

N. Eidelman

Conspiracy

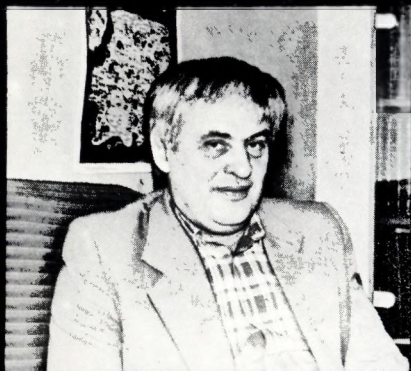
Against

the Tsar

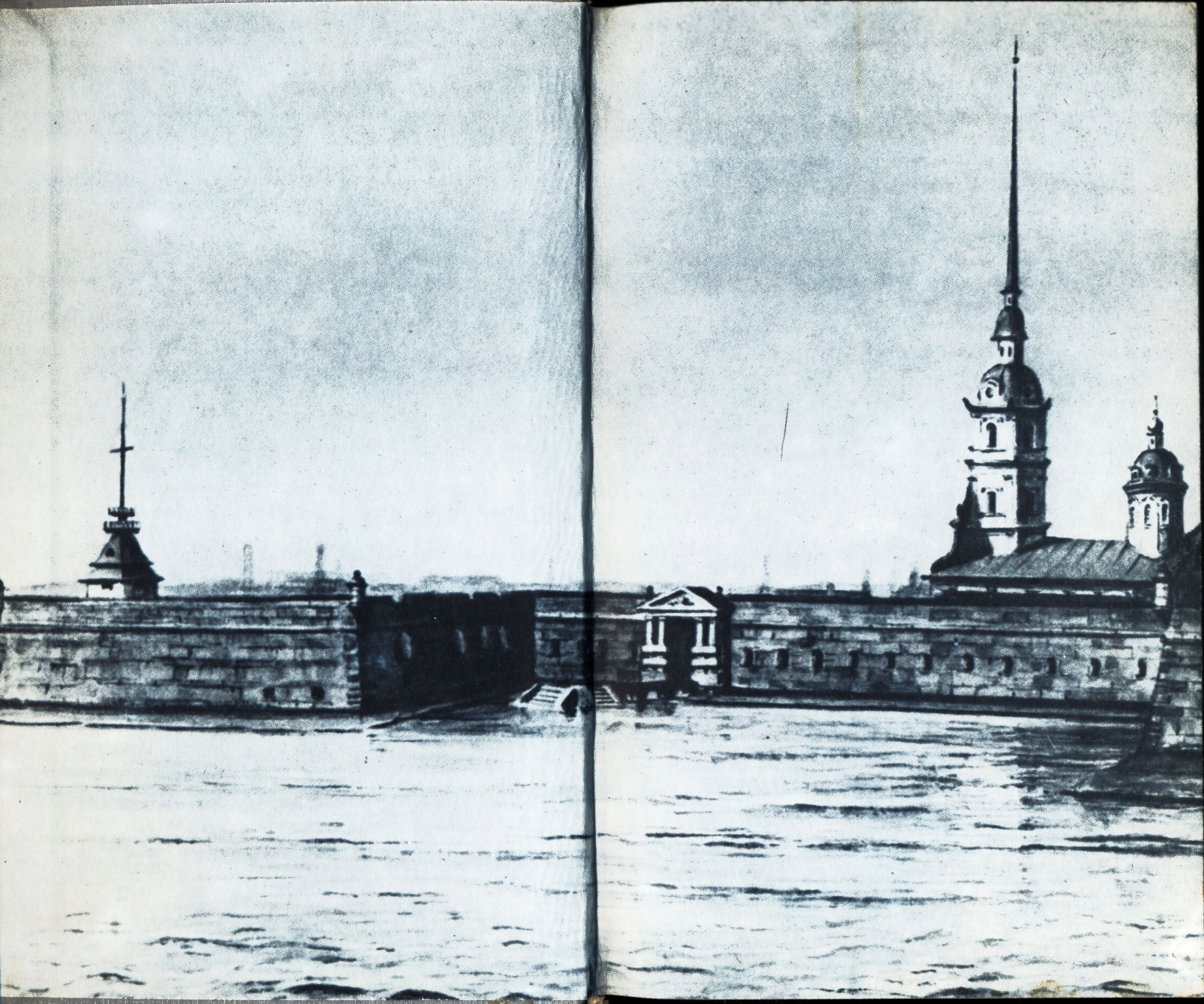
A Portrait of the Decembrists



Progress Publishers



Natan Eidelman was born on 18 April 1930 in Moscow. A well-known Soviet historian, his main interests lie with the social and cultural movements in Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries, on which he has written a large number of books. Among his most popular works on this theme are **LUNIN, SERGIUS THE APOSTLE, PUSHKIN AND THE DECEMBRISTS**, and **BETWEEN TWO CENTURIES**. Eidelman draws on a great deal of documentary evidence and attempts to follow the dialectics of historical interrelationships. His narrative style is lively and expressive.



N. Eidelman

Conspiracy Against the Tsar



Progress Publishers
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Introduction

The Decembrist movement involved several hundred people—members of the aristocracy, landowners who possessed tens of thousands of peasant-serfs, and young officers and generals (average age-25-26 years): in December 1825, they rose in rebellion against their emperor and their own class, against the slavery which served as the basis of their own wealth and education.

World history does indeed offer a few examples of black sheep, members of the upper classes who came out resolutely in defence of the lower classes. However, that 600 of the nobility (and there were several thousand more who sympathised with them), that is, a considerable portion of the ruling elite, should commit what was, in effect, social suicide, is unique in the annals of society. The aged Count Rostopchin, on hearing about the Decembrists, exclaimed: 'In France I can at least understand the revolution: there shoemakers wanted to become princes; In Russia I refuse to understand: here, it would seem, princes wished to become shoe makers!'

The old count could not understand what had happened—but he raised the question. Generations of scholars, artists and men of letters have pondered over the enigma of the Decembrists; Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Herzen and Nekrasov, Pushkin and Lermontov, and other great Russian writers, devoted some of their finest pages to them. They believed that the most important characteristic of the first Russian revolutionaries was their moral calibre, their selflessness and willingness to sacrifice themselves. The Decembrists are essential to understanding the Russian revolution, Russian culture and the Russian character. The enormous interest in the Decembrists that still exists in Russia today can be judged, amongst other things, by the fact that not only books on this subject written in a simple and accessible style, but also scholarly studies, are sold out immediately.

Nonetheless, this book is not about the history of the Decembrist movement as such, but about its most outstanding representatives, young Russian idealists of the beginning of the 19th century.

Who will pass before the reader (or at least, in some cases, be discernible in the background) in this series of literary portraits?

Pavel Pestel: the son of a Siberian governor, a young colonel with a brilliant future ahead of him, a man of a logical, mathematical cast of mind who, in order to ensure the victory of the revolution, proposed to make use of extreme, radical measures, replacing the monarchy with a republic and rigorous dictatorship.

Kondrati Ryleyev: another leader of the movement whose life was cut short at the age of 31 years. He was in many ways the exact opposite of Pestel—a poet, a reckless duellist, one who realised very early that the uprising was doomed, yet urged it on all the more ardently, saying: 'We must go through with it, all the same!' He was the only one of the five executed Decembrist leaders who had a wife and child, and he hoped for clemency; at the scaffold he conducted himself with courage and grace.

Sergei Muravyov-Apostol: the son of a senator, he studied in Paris, and at the age of 15 years became a lieutenant in the army fighting Napoleon. He took part in all the major battles and marched into Paris in 1814 a 17-year-old captain. A deeply religious man, he found in his faith arguments urging the need for self-sacrifice. He raised his regiment, stationed in the Ukraine, in revolt, but did not wish to spill blood and start a civil war; he was soon defeated, wounded, and then condemned to death at the age of 29 years. On the eve of his execution he exhorted his brother (also a Decembrist, but condemned to hard labour in Siberia) not to give way to despair but to live as long as possible for the good of the people.

Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin: a young officer who lived a little more than 20 years and who, in some respects, was similar to some of the left-wing leaders of today—enthusiastic, exalted, impressing his audience less with his reasoning than with his hypnotic eloquence. He brought into the movement many inexperienced army officers, was able to win the sympathy of Polish conspirators, and brought together Russian and Polish secret societies that had hitherto been wary of each other. Possibly it was his extraordinary temperament and ability to convince others that made him appear to the authorities particularly dangerous, and, finally brought him to the gallows.

Pyotr Kakhovsky: he also lived less than 30 years, yet long enough to experience many misfortunes in his youth;

sombre, lonely, withdrawn, with no close relatives or friends and abandoned by the woman he loved, he threw himself heart and soul into the revolution. On Senate Square on 14 December 1825, he spared neither himself nor others: he killed two military commanders on the opposing side. Later, during questioning, his description of the misery of his native land brought Nicholas I to tears, though this did not prevent him from sending Kakhovsky to the scaffold.

Mikhail Lunin: one of the most striking personalities of his day. A wealthy landowner, fluent in many languages, a hero of several wars, immensely popular with women and a famous duellist, he was, in addition, a first-class thinker... At first actively involved in conspiracy, he gradually lost faith in such methods of struggle, believing that the people were not yet ready for change, and doubtful of the wisdom of action before millions of people had demanded that things be altered. He began to distance himself from conspiracy but, arrested for old sins after the rebellion, he refused to ease his own lot at the expense of his companions. On the contrary, his attitude was one of defiance, and in Siberia he kept up the fight against the autocracy: he was the only Decembrist to be condemned a second time to hard labour in Siberia, where he died under mysterious circumstances.

Sergei and Maria Volkonsky: Sergei Volkonsky was a young general and a member of such a high-ranking noble family that for a long time the Tsar forbade any reference to him by name in secret documents, where he was indicated by the number of his cell—No. 4, lest information about such a famous personage should become public. His 20-year-old wife, immortalised by Pushkin, followed him to Siberia. A woman of extraordinary character, she feared no deprivations, moved regally through the Siberian population of convicted murderers, and survived with ease the dreadful Siberian frosts and complete isolation from the civilised life to which she had been accustomed.

These are just a few of the Decembrists whose portrait the reader will find in our book. There are others, no less amazing: eight Muravyov cousins, some of whom will die in Siberia, while one will earn the Tsar's forgiveness by changing his views completely and helping to punish his erstwhile companions. Then there is Ivan Sukhinov, a man of reckless and indomitable spirit who was, in effect, the sixth Decembrist to be executed; having attempted to escape from Siberia, he committed suicide on the eve of his execution.

Within the pages of this book the reader will even find a Decembrist who is famous throughout the world—but who was never a Decembrist (we will permit ourselves to intrigue the reader a little).

And so we invite you to travel back with us a mere 150 years to meet the fine young people who are remembered and loved in Russia today.

Twenty-Year-Old Sages



One winter's day, 9 February 1816, six people gathered at an officer's flat: four of them were relatives—the two brothers, Sergei and Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, and their cousins Nikita and Alexander Muravyov—'a whole anthill'.¹ Also present were Prince Sergei Trubetskoi and Ivan Yakushkin. The average age of these army officers, who had only recently fought their way from Moscow to Paris, was less than twenty one, but it was in this that they saw their advantage:

'Over the course of two years we were witnesses to great events that decided the fate of nations, and in one way or another we were involved in them; now it was unbearable to see the emptiness of life in St Petersburg and listen to the gossip of old men who praised everything that was old and condemned any movement forward. We were a hundred years ahead of them' (Yakushkin).

What did the six talk about?

About the fact that one of their friends had 'whipped a neighbour who tormented the peasants, and the neighbour had not even been able to understand why the other was whipping him and had lodged a complaint, successful, of course, with the authorities.'

About how a general, in the mistaken belief that an old sergeant-major with many years of faithful service behind him had been guilty of a breach of discipline, sent for sticks to beat him with and, 'sitting down to dinner, ordered him to be punished, calling out several times "I can't hear (the sound of blows)". When he got up from dinner, the sergeant-major was taken to hospital, where shortly afterwards he died. All the Guards regiments knew about what had happened. But this did not prevent the general from remaining a popular man with his fellow officers, keeping his position as the commander of the Hussars and enjoying even greater favour with the Tsar'.

Someone recalled that ordinary soldiers occasionally murdered the first person they came across, preferring penal servitude to a life in the army. One of the Muravyovs related how, through the chamberlain, he had sent a very moderate reform programme to the Tsar; the answer came back: 'The fool! Meddling in what is not his concern!'

¹ *Muravei* (Russian)—ant.

At this mention of the Tsar, everyone became more animated: they remembered how, on returning from the war, the Emperor had appeared riding at the head of a Guards division on a magnificent chestnut stallion, sword drawn ready to be lowered before the Empress. We were all gazing at him in admiration, when suddenly a peasant ran across the street almost in front of his horse. The emperor dug his spurs into his horse and charged after the fleeing man, waving his drawn sword. The police caught the peasant and dragged him away. We could not believe our eyes and we turned away, ashamed of the Tsar we all loved. That was our first taste of disillusionment on his account; we could not help remembering the cat who was turned into a beautiful woman, but who could not see a mouse without chasing it.'

Towards the end someone cited the proverb that, in Russia, 'he who could, robbed openly, and he who didn't dare, stole by stealth'.

What could be done to improve the sad lot of the country and the people? A voice exclaimed: 'We must not do nothing just because we cannot achieve everything!'

The six agreed to found the Union of Salvation: the name chosen spoke for itself. It was clear who had to be saved, and from what.

Sixty years later, Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, the last surviving member of the six founders of the Union of Salvation, will doubt even the ability of Lev Tolstoy to understand the true sentiments of the first Russian revolutionaries, the Decembrists. The old man was afraid that the younger generation would find their grandfathers' enthusiasm, self-sacrifice and dreams of universal reform strange and comical.

The Union of Salvation soon acquired a seventh member, who was a little late in joining only because that winter he had been recovering from a wound received in yet another of his innumerable duels.

We will now leave the Muravyovs for a while—their portraits will follow a little further on in the book—and begin our tale with the seventh conspirator, perhaps the most extraordinary of them all.

Mikhail Lunin

Lunin: I must have heard that tune somewhere before, and now it has come back to me.

Auger: No, it is your own composition.

Lunin: That may well be so.

This conversation took place in St Petersburg in the summer of 1816. Two years earlier the seventeen-year old French youth, Hippolyte Auger, had complained to Russian officers in Paris that, following the defeat of Napoleon, his affairs were in a very bad way indeed...

'So you must have placed certain hopes on the defeated government?'

'Yes, I hoped that in some battle or other I would be killed.'

'And what about the present government?'

'It has deprived me even of that hope.'

The officers took pity on the youth and persuaded him to join the Russian Guards: 'Grand Prince Constantine is as meek as a lamb, you only have to bleat along with him.' Auger scarcely had time to think before he found himself in St Petersburg wearing a Guards' uniform and almost penniless.

At that point, however, the young French lad made the acquaintance of Mikhail Lunin, and with this began a series of shared adventures.

In 1877, sixty-one years later, the journal 'Russian Archives' printed the reminiscences of Hippolyte Auger (who was still hale and hearty at that time) about his own youth, and in particular about the Decembrist Lunin.

If Lunin had not acquired a friend so fond of writing, if this friend had not been a Frenchman who remembered things which, in Russia, it was thought better to forget, and if that Frenchman had not, in his old age, suddenly thought to publish his notes (albeit slightly touched up), we would never have known, for example, what impression the twenty-nine year old Guards captain produced on his young interlocutor.

'Although I was unable, on our first meeting, to appreciate this remarkable man, I was captivated by his appearance. The hand he held out to me was small, muscular, aristocratic; the eyes were of an indeterminate colour, with a velvety gleam which made them seem black, and his gentle glance had a magnetic force.... He had a pale face with fine, regular features. Normally calm and ironic, this face would sometimes come to life suddenly, and then, just as quickly, take on once again an expression of imperturbable indifference, but his changeable physiognomy revealed more than he wished. One could sense will-power, but this did not manifest itself in repulsive severity as it does in ordinary men whose only desire is to command others. His voice was harsh and

penetrating; the words seemed to issue from his mocking lips of their own accord, and they always hit their target. In arguments he lashed his opponent, delivering wounds that never healed; the logic of his argumentation was as irrefutable as his humour was caustic. He rarely spoke to an already determined purpose; usually his ideas, both serious and light-hearted, flowed in a free and inexhaustible stream, the expressions formulated themselves spontaneously, natural, elegant and remarkably accurate.

'He was tall, slender and delicately built, but this thinness was not the result of illness: intense intellectual activity had early sapped his strength. His whole being, his way of moving and of speaking, bespoke inherent nobility and sincerity. For all his rational way of thinking, he was not without a certain sentimentality, which existed in him without his realising it; he did not attempt to evoke it, but did not prevent it revealing itself. He was a dreamer, a knight, a Don Quixote, always ready to tilt at windmills.'

Auger did not fail to note that Lunin 'submitted to his lot, listening to the empty, noisy chatter of the officers. Not that he wished to appear better than they were; on the contrary, he strove to behave like everyone else, but his unique character took the upper hand and broke through every minute inadvertently; he deliberately gave the impression of being empty-headed, and frivolous in order to conceal from everyone his secret intellectual activity and the aim that he pursued unswervingly.'

Every issue gave rise to debate between the new friends, leading them to ponder over various questions. Auger was jovial, but sensible. Lunin rebuked him: 'You are a Frenchman, so you ought to know that revolt is the sacred duty of every man.'

In the midst of all of this there took place that conversation about music to which we referred at the beginning of our story. Auger came to see his friend and found Lunin sitting at the piano.

'I play the piano as easily as birds sing. Once I was present when Steibel (a well-known musician) was giving a music lesson to my sister. I listened and watched; when the lesson ended, I knew everything I needed to know. At first I played by ear, and then, instead of repeating the ideas and refrains of others, I began to put my own ideas and feelings into the melodies I played. Beneath my fingers the obedient instrument says anything I wish it to: it expresses my dreams, my sor-

rows, my joys. It weeps for me and it laughs for me."

'Lunin continued with his variations. I was listening, full of admiration, when suddenly he put my sheet of paper on the music stand and began to sing my verses on disillusionment. His voice was not musical, but he sang from the heart, and the melody was so enchanting and so original that I could not suppress a cry of delight, forgetting completely that I was the author of the verse.'

On occasion Lunin would talk about his favorite composer, whose name was unknown to Auger. Indeed, Lunin himself had only recently heard about him from the Vyelgorsky brothers, noted connoisseurs of music. 'They were both delighted by the works of one German composer... In order to entertain my brother-in-law, Matvei Vyelgorsky sent for his instrument and began to play. What a pity you weren't there! That was true music. We didn't know whether we were on earth or in heaven. We forgot about everything. The composer was still largely unknown; many even deny that he has any talent. His name is Beethoven. His music reminds one of Mozart, but it is far more serious. And what inexhaustible inspiration! What richness of conception, what amazing variety despite the repetition! He produces such a powerful impression upon you that you even cease to be amazed by him. Such is the power of genius, but in order to understand him you must study him. In France you have not yet learned to appreciate serious music. We, however, who live in the north, love everything that moves the soul and compels us to think.'

Auger, no longer an 18-year-old youth, but an 80-year-old Paris writer who had seen much of the world in the course of his long life, still thought Lunin to be one of the most extraordinary men he had ever met:

'He was a poet and a musician, and at the same time a reformer, a political economist, a statesman who studied social questions and was familiar with every truth and every error... I knew Alexandre Dumas, and when we pondered over our joint works I was able to appreciate the colossal wealth of his imagination. Yet Lunin, fantasising on future solutions to major social problems, was far above him.'

From music and poetry they turned to more everyday affairs. When he learned that Auger and a captain friend of his were preparing to retire from the army, Lunin was full of approval:

'Now you will be free! Your captain has acted wise in ridding himself of those tastelessly-gilded chains which bind you to the court, where you are constantly under the gaze of the monarch. I am thinking of doing the same.'

'You?'

'I am even more visible: my dress uniform is white, and my walking-out uniform is red.'

'Serving in the Guards is an expensive business, father refuses to give me money, I may be arrested for debt.'

Auger: 'You won't be the first, or the last.'

Lunin: 'So much the worse. As soon as it becomes an ordinary affair, it loses any attraction for me. If such a misfortune befalls me, then I'll have to find some unusual way out.'

With his father, Sergei Mikhailovich Lunin, the respectful son, Mikhail Sergeyevich, concludes an extraordinary bargain: the father pays the son's debts and gives him a little money to start out with, and the son makes a will in his father's favour, that is, he renounces all claims to the property, capital, etc. He declares that he is preparing to leave for a place where there is something worth doing—for South America, for example, to join the liberation army of General Bolivar—and on his table there lies a book of Spanish grammar.

Lunin's devoted sister, Yekaterina Sergeyevna, her husband, Colonel Fyodor Uvarov, the father himself, and even Auger, are completely taken aback by Lunin's abrupt decision to abandon the army and his career.

According to Auger's notes, Lunin made his reply extempore in Russian, French and even Spanish.

'There is only one career open to me—the career of freedom, which in Spanish is called "Libertad", and in that career titles are meaningless, however grand they might be. You tell me that I have considerable abilities, and you want to see me bury them in some office or other out of the conceited desire to win rank and medals, which the French quite rightly refer to as baubles. Just imagine! I will earn a large salary for doing nothing, or for doing work that is meaningless or—even worse—for doing anything whatsoever. On top of that, my superior will be an idiot whom I will humour wishing to topple him and take his place. And you think that I could consent to such a pitiful existence? I will suffocate, and that will be a just punishment for blasphemy against the spirit. Excess energy will stifle me. No, no! I need freedom of

thought, freedom of will, freedom of service! That is what it means to really live! Away with the duties of service, with the existence of the worthless creature. I do not want to be dependent upon my official status: I wish to be of service to people in the way dictated to me by my reason and my heart. Citizen of the universe—there is no better title in the world. Freedom! I am going away from here.'

* * *

A few days later Lunin told his friend:

'In Paris I visited Lenormand.'

Auger: 'And what did the fortune-teller tell you?'

Lunin: 'She said that I would be hanged. I must do what I can to make sure the prophecy is fulfilled.'

Auger did not know where his friend had recently been spending his time.

Lunin himself did not suspect that he had already done almost everything needed to justify the reputation of the Parisian fortune-teller. He had become a member of a secret society, where he joined in the discussion of plans to murder the Tsar... A few months later Lunin will sharply upbraid Hyppolite Auger for 'not using his talents for the benefit of his homeland'. Whereas he himself is actively seeking such a use and selecting the best means to serve his country. He does not feel bound by the Union of Salvation. He does not see any great difference between fighting for Russian liberty or Spanish liberty; all things considered, however, he still hopes to return one day and bring with him something new and important for the conspirator cousins.

Auger persuades him to go not to Montevideo but, to begin with, to Paris.

Firstly, he is against cannibalism, without which, so it is said, one cannot survive in the pampas and selvas. Secondly, 'The Old World is worn out and decrepit; the New World is still untouched. America needs strong hands, Europe, old and toothless, needs developed minds.'

Paris it will be. Lunin calls on his sister, Yekaterina Uvarova, who is sleeping; he tells them not to wake her. His sister's husband, Fyodor Uvarov, accompanies him to the boat which takes the traveller to Kronstadt. As a parting gift, the ageing father gives his son a poud¹ of candles made of pure wax, 25 bottles of porter, as many bottles of rum and a large quantity of lemons. Lunin

¹ A poud 36 lbs (16.38 kg).

is moved and tells Auger that the lemons came as a complete surprise, and that he now realises that it would have been possible to reach an understanding with his father. He also promises that—perhaps—he will return in six months' time. According to other reminiscences, the father gave his son his library containing 3,000 books, and the son organised a raffle among his friends, collecting about 1,200 roubles.

On the 10¹ (22) September, 1816, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the French ship *Fidelite* loaded with tallow sails from Kronstadt for Le Havre with two passengers on board.

Three days later, while crossing the Baltic sea, Lunin and Auger have an important conversation on deck, which Auger relates in his reminiscences using the notes in diary:

'Lunin analysed all the passions capable of troubling the human heart. In his opinion, only ambition can raise a man above the life of an animal. By giving free rein to his imagination, his desires, by striving to raise himself above others, a man lifts himself out of his nothingness. He who can command, and he who must obey are beings totally different by nature. Family happiness consists in the cessation of all activity, the absence or, so to speak, the denial of the life of the mind. The whole world belongs to a man with a cause; for him his home is merely a temporary stopping-place where he may rest physically and mentally before setting off once more...

'It was a splendid piece of extempore reasoning, full of strange and, at times, elevated ideas.

'I could not agree with him, but at the same time I could not, and did not wish to refute what he said; I listened silently and thought: "What does the future hold in store for this man with his irrepressible and fiery imagination?"

'A bird landed on the rigging and someone wanted to catch it, but Lunin insisted that they let it go free... This enabled me to offer an argument against his theory. Independence is the only guarantee of human happiness, whereas ambition excludes independence from the affairs of this world. Independence enables a man to be himself, frees him from the need to constrain his own nature. Among that collection of units which compose society, only independent people are truly free. Poor Lunin had to admit the justice of my argument, which confirmed,

¹ According to the Julian calendar, used in Russia up to 1917.

as it were, the contradiction characteristic of every man, and particularly one who is ambitious... As I was copying this out from the yellowed pages of an old diary,' Auger confessed, 'I was overcome with confusion, as if I had glanced into some ancient tome containing prophecies. And indeed, Lunin's words already revealed the future conspirator who at the first opportunity moved from words to deeds and went boldly to his ruin. On the other hand, my opinions revealed the absence of a strong will, and this was the reason for my love of independence. For this same reason I was able to guard myself against many dangers and live to old age.'

A storm delayed the ship. The passengers could scarcely breathe in their cabin filled with the smell of tallow, but their spirits were high. From the deck came the sound of the simple prayer of a sailor: 'Most Gracious Mother of God, do not let us perish in the sea.'

In the journal *Russian Archives* this episode is considerably abridged, and for some reason the following story is missing completely:

'As there was a powerful head wind, we were obliged to return to Bornholm, where more favourable weather awaited us, and we moved onto the roadstead... Bornholm island, which belongs to Denmark, has a circumference of 25 leagues and numbers 20 thousand inhabitants. After breakfast a fishing sloop came for us, and we left for the shore. We were met by the governor of the island, who fortunately spoke German. He proved to be very amiable, invited us to his home and introduced us to his family. The land is gloomy and the small town poor. Huge quarries and windmills are its only wealth.

'In the church we found an organ in very bad condition. However, when he touched it, Michel succeeded in producing supernatural effect. The theme of his improvisation was the storm that we had experienced: first there was the soft grumbling of the wind, then the roar and crash of the waves—all of this came back to me when suddenly, in the pauses, came the sound of the prayer for help addressed to the gracious Mother of God... I was surprised and enchanted by this powerful imitation. Many of the local inhabitants came running to the church, scarcely able to believe that the organ, silent for so long, could produce such entrancing and gentle music.

'On a cliff overhanging the shore stand the picturesque ruins of Hammershaus castle, built by the ancient Danes. In the 17th century it was the prison of Count Urfeld, an ambitious man betrothed to the princess Elenora of Denmark, who dreamed of wearing the crown. The count

led the Swedish army against his fellow Danes, but was defeated and captured. He ended his days in this castle, together with princess Elenora, who came of her own accord to share his fate.

'The ruins are very picturesque, and Michel made a fine drawing. The castle is known as "Devil's castle".

'When it grew dark, we returned to the secure deck of our *Fidelite*.

The travellers then moved further West, into the Sound, stood at anchor off Elsinore and went ashore to visit prince Hamlet.

Lunin suddenly decided to condemn the reflective prince with the words of the irrepressible Figaro: 'People who do nothing are good for nothing and achieve nothing.' Auger notes this down, and comments: 'Sadly, he will undoubtedly achieve something.'

'An excess of energy', pride and independence had taken Lunin up to a great height: this was a dangerous moment! Just a little further, and one might turn oneself into a superman, a satanical hero, a Byronic despot who fights, and even dies, out of boredom and contempt for mankind.

However, Lunin is too intelligent and too well-read not to recognise the danger, and, having recognised it, to turn away from such a dangerous path. 'His philosophical mind was able to catch a half-formed thought in mid-flight, to see into the essence of things at first glance... He was an independent thinker, often arriving at the most daring conclusion.'

After the Sound they continue to sail for some time across the autumn waters. At last, after a journey of six weeks, they arrive at Le Havre, and the following evening a coach takes the travellers to Paris.

1817

'In the Louvre they were scraping the letter 'N' from the walls.

'Napoleon was on the island of St. Helena, and as England refused to give him green cloth, he had turned his old uniforms inside out.

"The happiness derived from the study of science" was the examination theme set by the Academie Francaise. Large newspapers shrank to small ones. Their format was restricted, but their freedom was great...

'On the river Seine, a strange, smoking object splashed and puffed, sailing up and down beneath the windows of Les Tuileries; it was a mechanical toy, the useless

invention of some empty-headed dreamer: a steamship. The Parisians gazed with indifference at this pointless venture... All sensible people were agreed that the age of revolutions had ended for ever.¹ This colourful survey by Victor Hugo lacks only a Russian with a military bearing, the heir to enormous estates and Tambov serfs who, on arriving in Paris (and concealing his identity by calling himself Saint Michel), declares to his companion: 'All I need is a room, a bed, a table and a chair; the tobacco and candles are sufficient for several months yet. I am going to work: I shall start on my False Dmitri.'²

Why, then, travel so far?

Why? Because in St Petersburg it is virtually impossible for a guards officer and man of the world to live by his own labour: it would be considered an offensive eccentricity; besides, they are still not accustomed to paying writers. If anything, just the reverse—noblemen are accustomed to pay to have their works printed.

Hippolyte Auger discovers that his friend is thinking of writing in French ('Could one say I know Russian?'); he wants to write, though in the future 'scribbling must take second place: it will be replaced by the living word, which will advance the cause of civilisation and patriotism'; however, repeats Lunin, before this can happen writers and poets whose works are in Russian will prepare the ground 'for the acceptance of ideas'. Auger asserts that his Russian companion believed such writers to be Karamzin, Batiushkov, Zhukovsky and Pushkin ('The rising star of Pushkin the lyceum pupil, the boy who appears in brightness').

'I have thought out,' Lunin continues, 'the main lines of a historical novel about the period of the interregnum; that is the most interesting period in our chronicles, and I have set myself the aim of elucidating it. Although the story of the False Dmitri is somewhat legendary, it is nonetheless the prologue to our life today. And how much drama! I thought it all over during the storm.'

Auger remembers that he was enthusiastic over the plan of the novel. Work moved ahead rapidly, and the Frenchman wanted to show the results to a competent judge. Lunin agreed, but requested Auger not to give the work to a

¹ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*. Editions Etablie et Annotée par Maurice Allem, Gallimard, Paris, 1951, pp. 147-151.

² Dmitri—younger son of Ivan the Terrible and heir to the throne. He died in mysterious circumstances, and his death is sometimes ascribed to Boris Godunov. Later several claimants to the throne gave themselves out to be Dmitri following the death of Boris Godunov.

scholar: 'My mind likes to express itself in images. I do not intend to try to prove that two and two make four, but I want to act upon the emotions of the reader, and I believe I can. The poetry of history should come before philosophical understanding.'

The unfinished novel was read by Charles Brifaut, a well-known writer of the day, a future member of the Academie Francaise: 'Your Lunin is an enchanter! I don't think even Chateaubriand could have written better!'

In 1817, 'as good as Chateaubriand' meant most outstanding.

For a long time Brifaut could not forget the novel he had read, and he tried to please certain Russian nobles with the spectacle of the success of a compatriot, but he once heard the princess Natalya Kurakina declare: 'Lunin is a scoundrel' (probably a reference to his unguarded conversations on various issues and his escapades in Russia).

Nothing has remained of *The False Dmitri* except the title. One can only assume that Time of Troubles, with its anarchic passions and characters, attracted Lunin by its kinship with his own nature: the freedom of choice which the 1600s offered to dynamic personalities, the Lunins of that time (did Pushkin perhaps hear of the idea of the novel and use it for his brilliant drama *Boris Godunov*?)

Yekaterina Uvarova to her brother, Mikhail Lunin:

'There is something about you which automatically attracts people from the start and wins you their affection. People such as you are a success everywhere... You are exceptionally kind... You have only one fault, not a very important one, your restless passion to roam the world.'

To this letter from his wife, Uvarov adds that she herself also has one fault: 'She loves you too much... Foreign ambassadors will soon come to hate you: as soon as Katenka sees one of them, she immediately gives them a letter for you.'

The one described as 'a success everywhere' is at that very moment writing to Hippolyte Auger (who has left for a time to visit his parents): 'I am in bad health and cannot get out of bed. I have used up all my candles, burnt all my firewood, smoked all my tobacco and spent all my money. I am able to bear with misfortune: in good times and in bad I am always the same. However,

I must think of you.' He sees three ways out for his friend—ask his father for three thousand francs, join the army, or go to live with relatives. 'Here one can find a way of being useful to society, and there, too, one can study and write, provided one has sufficient will power! As for myself, I have already begun to cast around for something. All work is honourable if it is useful to society. The great Epaminondas was the keeper of eastern pipes in Thebes.'

At this point Auger added a comment that was not published in the printed text: 'At a time when the Russian armies are still occupying France, this brilliant, intelligent officer in the Horse Guards cites Epaminondas and Cincinnatus, talking of work in an artisan's workshop for the good of the fatherland.'

It is said that Lunin lived with five paupers in the attic of a house belonging to a widow and that they had one cloak and one umbrella between them, which they took turns in using.

As regards the widow and other details of life in Paris, curious tales have come down to us, related by Lunin himself to his companions in prison in Siberia: 'He lived in lodgings at the house of a certain Madame Michelle, who became rather attached to him. At table she invited him to sit next to her—and what a table! The plates, knives and forks were all fastened down with chains—this was Michel's first encounter with them... Sometimes he earned as much as 10 francs a day by writing letters—he had become a public clerk and wandered the streets of Paris with his booth on wheels. He told us how he had sometimes written love letters for *grisettes*. Then he translated business letters from French into English. He wrote them wrapped up in a blanket because he had no firewood in his attic.'

Let us add that he also composes congratulatory verse (he is paid for his unique handwriting), and, finally, he gives lessons in mathematics, music, English and ... French.

How else is a Russian to earn his living, if not by teaching French to Parisians?

It would seem that, having once compared poverty to duelling or to a cavalry attack, he survives it with no less pleasure; many years later, Fyodor Dostoyevsky will remark on the unusual courage of this man: many of his fellow students had learned not to fear the dangers of war or a duel; but not to fear poverty and drudgery—this was rare indeed! Lunin, it should be noted, believes in fate in the sense that each individual meets a sufficient-

ly wide variety of people and circumstances, and that the art of life consists only in noting and selecting in good time the right people and the right circumstances.

A hundred years later Alexander Blok will write:

*We love cold science passionately pursued;
The visionary fire of inspiration;
The salt of Gallic wit, so subtly shrewd,
And the grim genius of the German nation.¹*

Auger confesses that many of Lunin's affairs and thoughts were either unknown to him or beyond his understanding: sometimes, in the spirit of the age, the Russian would plunge into ingenious arguments about magnetism and mystic secrets ('Here, too, Lunin's originality was just as engaging, and I am convinced that, had he remained in Paris, he would have become famous'), another time he suddenly appears in the salon of the charming Baroness Lidia Roger, where he makes the acquaintance of the most unexpected people, from the great Saint-Simon to the former chief-of-police, Colonel Saint-Aulaire (Auger admits that he was afraid Lunin might in some way compromise himself in the eyes of the policeman, but Lidia Roger managed to smooth over the situation); once he set off together with Hippolyte to visit an acquaintance from St Petersburg, the famous Jesuit, Grivel, who concludes that 'we need such people'. However, neither Lunin nor Auger wish 'to become Jesuits in civilian dress' (those who secretly spread the ideas of the order without externally changing their life-style).

The day came, however, when Lunin 'became withdrawn'. Auger 'did not venture to question him, although he suspected that Lunin was harbouring secret plans, judging by the individuals who began to visit him... Ten years later, Buchez, one of the leaders of the Carbonari, told me that a young, enthusiastic Russian used to take part in their meetings; I think it was Lunin.'

To acquire political knowledge, understand these secret societies that had spread across almost all of post-Napoleonic Europe—perhaps here one might discover the long-sought lever upon which to bear down with all abilities, power and ambition?

It seems that new acquaintances distracted Lunin from the False Dmitri, and the 19th century took precedence over the 17th...

¹ Alexander Blok, 'The Scythians', tr. by Alex Miller, in *Three Centuries of Russian Poetry*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980.

At this point, however, events occur which were to be recorded many years later in the reminiscences of friends. In Russia Lunin's father is dying. 'Once, while Michel was sitting at the table, the rattle of coach wheels could be heard on the cobblestones accustomed to the more or less street-worthy boots of peaceful pedestrians. The banker Laffitte comes in, asks Lunin his name and gives him 100,000 francs. Lunin invites the entire table d'hôte, including the mistress of the house, to have dinner in a restaurant outside the city, takes them there in a carriage, gives Madame a ring—and at the end of the dinner says farewell to them forever.'

'Now I am rich,' reasons Lunin, 'but this wealth does not make me happy. It would be quite another matter if I had grown wealthy through my own work, through the use of my own mind.'

Auger asks Lunin if he is now thinking of returning home.

'If my affairs will allow me; what those affairs are you had better not inquire, for in any case I will not tell you the truth.'

What would have happened to Lunin if his father had lived another ten years or so?

Most probably he would have met a violent end, whether in Paris, or South America, or back home in Russia. Possibly his very talent and intellect would have destroyed him, thrusting him first into one adventure, then another ('Excess of energy is suffocating me').

At a farewell evening at the salon of Baroness Roger, Lunin talks with Henri de Saint-Simon, a small, ugly, amazingly polite and magnetically interesting conversationalist. The great philosopher is sorry to hear that the Russian is leaving.

'Yet another clever man is slipping away from me! Through you I might have made the acquaintance of a young nation that has not yet become desiccated with scepticism. There is fertile ground there for a new philosophy.'

'But, Count,' replies Lunin, 'we can exchange letters! Conversation and correspondence may both equally serve your purpose.'

However, Saint-Simon prefers verbal disputation in which 'every rejoinder is a promise of victory'. 'In any case, when you return home, you will immediately take up some futile, useless occupation that requires neither system nor principles, in short, at your age you will undoubtedly take up politics.'

The Baroness commented that Saint-Simon himself con-

stantly engaged in politics.

'I do so whether I will or no... Politics is an unavoidable evil, a brake on the progress of mankind.'

'But politics illumines progress!'

'Do you call the unending replacement of one error with another progress?'

And Saint-Simon began to develop his favourite ideas on the need to develop industry and science, refreshing them with noble sentiments and a renewed Christianity, 'and the nations can have no other politics'.

On parting he says to Lunin: 'If you forget me, do not forget the proverb: if you hunt two hares, you catch neither. Ever since the days of Peter the Great you have been constantly expanding your frontiers: do not lose yourselves in boundless space. Rome was destroyed by its victories: the teaching of Christ took root in ground saturated with blood. War maintains slavery; peaceful labour will lay the foundation for freedom, which is the inalienable right of every man.'

After Saint-Simon had left, the Russian, according to Auger, 'remained silent for a long time, plunged in thought'.

However, the carriage and lackey hired with the money sent from St Petersburg are already waiting. Lunin says that he would willingly take Hippolyte back with him to Russia, but the latter will not wish to live at his (Lunin's) expense, nor is this necessary; and with his customary friendly frankness, Lunin, as he leaves, explains:

'I know you better than you know yourself, and I am convinced that you will never amount to anything, although you are talented at everything.'

'Are you not being too severe, my dear Michel?'

'Certainly not! Ever since you returned to your native land, you have been engaged in trifles; and this despite the fact that all paths are open to you, and you could, if you had used your abilities to the benefit of your homeland, have made a good future for yourself.'

'I understand what you wish to say, my friend! This is not the first time you have attempted to reason with me concerning politics, but it is to no avail: you will never make a politician of me.'

'All the worse for you. Your native land is at present in such a situation that it is precisely in this field that one might be beneficial.'

'There are other paths, besides that of politics.'

'The broad road is shorter and less dangerous. Do not think that my sojourn in France has been without benefit for Russia. If you were the kind of man I need, that is,

if, with your abilities and kind heart, you also had a certain degree of ambition, I would take you back with me by force, though of course not for you to pass your time engaged in nonsense in St Petersburg drawing-rooms.'

At the gates of the city the Russian and the Frenchman embraced each other and parted for ever.

Auger ends his notes as follows: 'I continued to lead a useless life, not understanding my real purpose.'

Lunin returns home, to his friends the Muravyovs who had invited him to save Russia. The first he meets is his kindly cousin Nikita Muravyov.

Restless Nikita

Once, at a ball, his mother advised the 12-year-old Nikita Muravyov to dance. 'Mother,' asked the son, 'did Aristides and Cato dance?' 'One must assume,' the mother answered, 'that at your age they did.' Nikita immediately went to dance.

Many years had passed since that incident, and Russia has been invaded by Napoleon. Nikita is barely 16 years old, but he asks for permission to join the army; his mother forbids him outright: the young admirer of Greek heroes had lost his father many years previously, and his health is not too strong. However, one morning Nikita fails to appear at the breakfast table. The household looks for him everywhere. The day passes full of agonised suspense. The lad had left early that morning in order to join the Russian army, which was approaching the walls of Moscow. Having walked thirty or forty miles, he is then stopped by peasants. He has no passport, is well-dressed, and has a map of the war and a paper onto which was copied the position of the armies of the belligerents! Mistaken for a French spy, he is treated roughly, his hands are tied, and he is taken back to Moscow and thrown into the city jail. The governor-general sends for him and questions him. Amazed to see such patriotism in one so young, the governor-general then sends him back to his mother and congratulates her on having a son inspired by such noble and elevated sentiments. Only a year later, however, Nikita, a 17-year-old officer, is already on the march, fighting his way across the whole of Europe to Paris. In the capital of France he has occasion to talk with Count Caulaincourt and other famous and scintillating people: his memory, quick wit and command of many languages astonished the sages of Paris, who had witnessed many

things in their lifetime, and they prophesied that a brilliant future lay ahead of him. If only they had known just how brilliant, and how dreadful!

If they had only known that in less than two years this young man who, in the words of his cousin Lunin, 'was worth the whole of the academy'—this young man will not only become the leader of the six conspirators, but will be entrusted with the most dangerous and honorable task—that of drawing up the secret constitution of the future Russia, a Russia without absolutism and slavery. Who else should write it, if not this youth who had read more books than all his relatives taken together, who was familiar with the constitutions and laws of England, France, America, Ancient Rome and Greece—as familiar as if he had written them himself! 'The original manuscript of *The Constitution of Nikita Muravyov* is now kept in the main book and manuscript archives of the USSR, the Lenin Library in Moscow. Then, however, when the 19th century was still young, Nikita Muravyov possibly appeared to his friends as the future president or legislator of a free Russia. 'Restless Nikita' is how Pushkin will describe him in one of his poems... Nonetheless, Nikita continues to serve in the Guards, is given the rank of captain, and marries the gentle and lovely Alexandra Chernysheva. The letters of relatives, friends and neighbours are full of enthusiastic exclamations: what a marvellous couple!

But can one allow oneself family happiness if one is the leader of a secret society, the author of a constitution and therefore can expect no mercy; if the revolution is about to begin, today or tomorrow?

Some of Muravyov's companions, for example Lunin, believed that a wife and children were a luxury they could not permit themselves; however, youth won the day—dry, monastic fanaticism was not in their nature; in any case, the revolution might, after all, be victorious, and then personal happiness would merge with general rejoicing.

How strange it is to enter into the joys and dreams of this young man, and indeed of other people who lived in the past; strange because we know what will become of them later... We know, but they are virtually ignorant. Maybe Nikita Muravyov just guesses, anticipates what is to follow.

Perhaps the final, most dreadful decision of fate is anticipated by the other members of the remarkable 'anthill'.

Three brothers

Let us return once more to the very beginning of the 19th century.

A large family, members of the Russian nobility—the mother, Anna Semyonovna Myravyova-Apostol, four daughters and two sons, Sergei and Matvei, are leaving to join their husband and father, Ivan Matveyevich, who has been appointed Russian ambassador to Madrid; they journey across Europe, where the name of the First Consul of the French Republic is mentioned with increasing frequency.

'Sergei Muravyov-Apostol,' a contemporary will recall, 'was not very tall, but rather heavy; his features, particularly in profile, bore such a resemblance to those of Napoleon I that the latter, on seeing him in Paris, at the Ecole Polytechnique where he was studying, said to one of his entourage: 'Who would believe that he is not my son!'

Napoleon grew more quickly than did the children. When Matvei was born, Napoleon was still an ordinary artillery officer. When Sergei appeared, he was already a general and the commander-in-chief in Italy. While the Muravyovs were living in Hamburg (where the father was ambassador before being appointed to Madrid), the general fought in Egypt and became First Consul of France. When the boys found themselves in Paris, they arrived in time to witness the coronation of the Emperor Napoleon I.

The father is of the opinion that Madrid is a backwater where 'it is impossible to educate' the children, and he sends them and their mother across the Pyrenees to stay in the best Paris boarding schools. It is while they are in Paris that the seventh child is born, Ippolit, whom the father will not see for quite some time. He stays in Madrid, where he succeeds in setting the Spanish king and his ministers against Napoleon.

Our main interest is in Anna Semyonovna Muravyova-Apostol and her seven children, and an old packet of letters, written in French and kept in the Moscow archives, are fully sufficient to satisfy our curiosity.

Having read about ten of these letters, we become accustomed to their tenor, their structure, and we already know that the 11th, the 25th and the 50th missive will begin, as likely as not, with rebukes to the absent-minded and lazy Ivan Matveyevich for writing so infrequently, failing to answer questions, not numbering his letters... Then comes the invariable second part

of the letter: there is no money, they are getting deeper into debt—what are they to do? Finally, the children. It is strange, and even frightening to read touching details, comic episodes and maternal anxieties.

These are letters from bygone years, from the first volumes of *War and Peace*.

Anna Semyonovna writes very little about the three youngest children, convinced that their father is as yet little interested in their behaviour.

The baby Ippolit... He enjoys special privileges: he is the youngest; his father has never seen him, but he is nonetheless his son and the third successor to the line.

'Ippolit is the only one of us all who does everything he wants', 'Ippolit is beginning to show an interest in his father'.

Anna Semyonovna manages her tiny, noisy kingdom energetically, firmly and wisely. Only rarely does she mention her own ailments—'coughing blood'; she does not guess that she is on the verge of death, referring to such an eventuality only once: 'If I see my children unfortunate, I will die of grief!'

On 10 August 1806, nine months after the battle of Austerlitz and ten months before Tilsit, letter No. 79 makes its way through the warring armies. 'Today is a great celebration, the boys are going back to school,'—that is, the holidays are over. To mark the event, the boys are allowed to write their own letters to their father, and before us lie the first letters by Matvei and Sergei, written, naturally, in French.

The 13-year-old Matvei: 'Dear Papa, today I am going back to school. I am very sorry that I did not receive the award, but I hope to win it back within the next six months. Mama gave a dinner for my professor, who promised to watch over my studies very carefully.'

A little lower down comes the uneven handwriting of 10-year-old Sergei: 'Dear papa, I embrace you with all my heart. I would like to have a little letter from you (at this point the mother has added: 'The same request is made by Matvei'). You have never yet written to me. This year I will be in the third year with my brother. I promised you that I would work hard. Goodbye, dear papa, I send you all my love.' Signature 'Serge'.

Sergei, younger than Matvei by three years, is clearly catching up on his elder brother.

During the years in Paris a gradual change takes place in the relationship between the two brothers; Sergei first overtakes his brother, and then imperceptibly becomes the leader whose superiority is increasingly

recognised by the kind-hearted and somewhat melancholic Matvei.

The boarding school run by Monsieur Hix is a first-class and fairly independent establishment.

The children move from form to form to the accompaniment of the roar of Napoleonic victories.

The times were such that people sought Napoleons in feature and in character—and of course they found them! At that time, Napoleon possibly evoked involuntary admiration even in the breast of peaceful, sober people: everyone dreams of mastering fate, of subordinating circumstances—one's own modest fate and ordinary circumstances. But, sadly, frustratingly, it does not work! And then, suddenly, an ordinary artillery officer seems to succeed, subordinating to himself worlds, armies, the elements. One can hope, after all; everyone may dream... However, when one of Monsieur Hix' pupils makes fun of Russia, Sergei rises to her defence and the enemy withdraws. The director of the school smooths things over as best he can: well-born Russian pupils, the children of a well-known diplomat, boost the reputation of his establishment, not to speak of the 3,500 livres in annual fees for the two boys.

* * *

The Tilsit peace treaty was signed; on a summer's day in 1807 the short Napoleon and the long Alexander embraced on a raft in the middle of the river Nieman. Russia and France were at peace, they were friends. Paris is filled with Russians, who are so numerous that to Anna Semyonovna it seems that 'the city will soon be more Russian than French'. Balls and receptions (expenses!) are unavoidable.

On 10 January 1808, the mother writes to the father: 'Matvei has begun to work a little better... Sergei has been working very well this last month, his professors are very pleased with him and both have begun to study in Russian. The ambassador, Count Tolstoy, has allowed one of his secretaries to give them lessons in Russian three times a week in the boarding school, and they are full of enthusiasm.' And so Matvei at the age of fifteen years, and Sergei at the age of thirteen, are introduced to their native language. Later, it will seem to Lev Tolstoy (not the ambassador but the novelist), as he reflects on the education received by many of the Decembrists, that the whole movement was imported into Russia

together with the rest of the 'French acquisitions', and that it was not a home-grown phenomenon. This is one of the reasons (though not the only one) why the novel *War and Peace* goes no further than 1820. Subsequently, however, the writer will repeatedly re-examine his opinion; his artistic and historical sense told him that the expression 'French Decembrists' rang false, and that it was only too easy to evade in this way a serious exploration of the extremely important emotions and deeds of hundreds of young people.

The two boys came late to a study of Russian, but 'they are full of enthusiasm' and in other letters Anna Semyonovna continues to repeat, even a little astonished: 'full of enthusiasm!' Why such enthusiasm? What will it lead to? Very probably they are learning their own language later than any other young people around the world and will say their first Russian words later than millions of their illiterate fellow countrymen. However, for others their native language is a natural phenomenon, something they acquired 'with their mother's milk' while for Matvei and Sergei, it is a consciously appreciated and social event. The vague sense that 'we are Russian', acquired from family conversations and clashes with fellow pupils, now has the native language added to it, and a powerful chemical reaction takes place, almost an explosion. This is a highly dangerous experiment! Hundreds of youths who knew no Russian till they grew their first moustache will remain French, as did Ippolit Kuragin in *War and Peace*. But for some, such as Matvei and Sergei, the first words, the first sentences in Russian are an event full of significance.

From mother to father. May 1808: 'Last week your little Sergei was third in French calligraphy, and in rhetoric he was equal to boys who are all almost 16 or 17 years of age; the mathematics teacher is very pleased with Sergei and he told me that Sergei has a good head; just think—he is not yet 12 years old! I should tell you that he works a great deal, is very fond of reading, and prefers to spend the whole day behind a book than to go walking; yet he is also such a child that sometimes he spends the time with his little sisters, playing with their dolls or embroidering dolls' dresses. He is truly extraordinary.'

Later the teacher will tell the mother that Sergei is capable of 'achieving something great in science'.

It was at this time that Anna Semyonovna had occasion to converse with General Betancourt, the director general of railways in Russia, a representative, so to speak, of

technical thought. The conversation soon moves to the boys, and at this point the general said something quite novel for the mother; instead of the usual advice, into which regiment or the office of which minister it would be best to register them, Betancourt advises that they take up a career in mathematics: 'He assured me that there are very few experienced Russian engineers, and that, as Sergei is so good at mathematics, he should, on finishing at the school, attend the Ecole Polytechnique. That will take another five years, but the higher technical education he would receive as a result would be a blessing both for himself and for his country. As for Matvei, mathematics may turn him into an artillery officer. Only here can one acquire a genuine mathematical education. In Russia it is more difficult, or, to put it plainly—impossible. By that time Matvei will be 20, and Sergei—17.'

The exact sciences, a technical education... It is if we are listening to a voice from the next century. And suddenly we can imagine Sergei as a mathematician, completing his studies in 1813, and then, perhaps, Sergei Ivanovich Muravyov-Apostol, member of the Academy and the founder of a school of mathematics? Service to his country through education, science, invention, technical progress? Will it not soon be noted that some invent the steam engine, some storm the Bastille, some strangle tyrants, and yet others elaborate formulae—and, perhaps, all together, without themselves being aware of it, they are working in different ways to melt the towering iceberg of despotism?

However, such ideas do not yet occur to the young mathematician in the boarding school of Monsieur Hix, even in his dreams. Nonetheless his parents are disturbed: on one side of the scales there is the authority of general Betancourt, the enormous prestige of mathematics in the country of Laplace, Lagrange and Arago. No minor consideration! On the other side, however, the weights are even heavier: the European world is unstable, ephemeral, and far-sighted people already anticipate 1812—they would not have five years in France! Furthermore, whereas in the West the exact sciences had already been promoted "to the rank of general", in Russia they were still only junior officers (albeit showing no small signs of promise!). Politics, belles-lettres and philosophy were still in command.

Finally, on 21 June 1809, the last letter is dispatched from Paris: 'I am leaving tomorrow!'

Anna Semyonovna is horrified to discover that the journey to Frankfurt will take a week, and that they will

be travelling 'in a completely open carriage without springs or seats', while the boys are delighted at the prospect of this journey along an unknown road and into unheard-of adventures.

Ivan Matveyevich, discharged from diplomatic service and long unaccustomed to the bustle of family life, is about to be joined by his wife and seven children from Paris. It is almost summer, 1809, and Anna Semyonovna has less than a year to live, Sergei has seventeen, Ivan Matveyevich, still only half-way long the path of life, has another 42 years ahead of him, while his elder son Matvei will live another seventy-seven years.

'At the border between Prussia and Russia, the children having seen a Cossak standing on guard, jumped out of the carriage and ran to embrace him. When they had got back into the carriage to continue on their way, their mother told them something that amazed them. "I am very happy to see," she said to her children, "that your long sojourn abroad has not cooled your feelings towards your homeland, but be prepared for a shock, children, for I have a dreadful thing to tell you: you will discover there something you do not know: in Russia you will find slaves." Mother had never mentioned slaves, fearing that knowledge of their existence would have a corrupting influence on the child's mind.'

These lines have been taken from the words of the elder son, Matvei Ivanovich.

Matvei and Sergei, intelligent boys, do not know that their splendid education and prosperity were paid for by the labour of one and a half thousand slaves in Poltava, Tambov and Novgorod. Their parents believe that knowledge of this fact may corrupt, that is, may produce a harsh and indifferent cynic. Thus—first a noble education that does not admit of slavery, and then a sudden revelation: a land of slaves, and moreover, of slaves whose labour pays for this noble education.

As one might expect, during the long journey from the border to the capital, the boys had time to exhaust their mother (and later their father) with questions: how can this be so? And, of course, they were told that things would alter: Tsar Alexander I is of the opinion that slavery should be abolished and 'with God's help it will end even during his reign'.

In Kiev Ivan Matveyevich makes the acquaintance of his seven children. Then they travel to St Petersburg.

On the road from the Neva to the Ukraine, in Moscow, Anna Semyonovna suddenly falls ill, and dies only a few days later. At her graveside stand her husband and

seven children, the youngest of whom is four years old, the eldest—nineteen.

* * *

It is the year of 1812, dreadful, bloody, heroic.

Various documents, important and business-like, harsh and horrifying. Here, for example, is the Report on the Disposal of Bodies on the Field of Borodino (after the famous battle of 1812): '56,811 human corpses and the corpses of 31,664 horses have been burned. The operation cost 2,101 roubles, 50 kopecks, 776 sazhen¹ of firewood and two barrels of wine.'

Of the nineteen-year old officer, Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, it was said that he shrugged off enemy cannon balls as if playing a game.

Two days after the battle Sergei is 15 years and 11 months old. During the battle of Borodino he is held at army headquarters. Possibly Kutuzov himself is taking care of the young son of such a famous father.

The young officers will subsequently return to St Petersburg to complete their studies, but Sergei Ivanovich, already sixteen years old, will use the influence of relatives to remain at the battlefield, and a general who is a relative of the family will take him into his regiment. After the battle at Krasnoye, Sergei is awarded a golden sword with the inscription 'For Courage'. By the end of the year he will be a lieutenant and will be awarded a decoration.

Death walks side by side with these happy, hungry youths: it snatches at Matvei in the famous battle at Kulm, and takes aim at Sergei in the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig.

Matvei, writing to his sister from the city of Gotha, where he is convalescing from his wounds, in a letter dated 21 October 1813: 'At Leipzig Sergei fought with his battalion. He had never seen the like, but he came out of it alive and unhurt, even though he had been under fire from mid-day to nightfall on the 4 October, and even veteran soldiers said that they could remember nothing like it.'

Both survived, however, and the two brothers were together 'in beautiful Gotha, and today the city will give a ball that we will never forget, and ahead of us is the march to the Rhine and the joys of homecoming.'

Matvei Ivanovich—sixty years later:

¹ Sazhen—2.134 metres.

'Every time I leave the present and return to the past, I find there a great deal more warmth. The difference between the two times is expressed by one word: love. We were the children of 1812. We were moved from the heart to sacrifice all, even life itself, out of love for our homeland. Egotism was alien to us. God will testify to that.'

From March 1814, the brothers found themselves in Paris (together with their cousins Lunin and Nikita Muravyov). On horseback and on foot they had fought their way back along the route they had travelled with Anna Semyonovna five years previously. In Paris they no doubt hurried to rediscover the people and places of childhood—the Hix boarding school, the old house, the opera, the embassy...

But it was time to return home to their father, sisters and the eight-year old Ippolit, who had long since started to play at being the elder brother.

Together with the grenadier corps, Sergei once again marches across the whole of France and Germany covering this road for the fourth and last time in his life. Matvei is with the Guards, travelling from Paris across Normandy to Cherbourg, from where they will depart on a Russian squadron for Kronstadt.

The boys have returned home—and two years later who else but they should save Russia: the Union of Salvation.

The album of Praskovya Alexandrovna Osipova-Wolf, owner of landed estates and friend of the great poet Pushkin, had been given to her as a present 'from cousin S. I. Muravyov-Apostol'. A discussion began about the popular belief that he who was the first to write in an album would die shortly thereafter. This discussion was echoed in the inscription by Osipova herself: 'As I fear nothing at all, least of all death, I will be the first to write in my album.' Immediately after this comes the humorous-prophetic entry by S. I. Muravyov-Apostol:

'I neither fear nor desire death. May it be as God wills!!!! When death comes, it will find me perfectly prepared, and only then will Your image, dear cousin, fade from my heart—if it does not follow me into the next world (I cannot vouch for this, as it is an area unknown to me). Your cousin, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol. Petersburg, 12 May 1816.'

A few more years will pass: in the centre of the capital a certain writer meets an acquaintance, who is an officer in the famous Semyonovsky Guards regiment, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol.

'What's the matter?' asked the friend. 'Are you ill?'

'No, I'm not ill, simply not happy, there is nothing to be happy about.'

'Have patience and hope.'

Muravyov-Apostol glanced sadly at his friend and said: 'Live in hope, and die in dirt,' bowed and continued on his way.

Many, many years later, the ageing Matvei Muravyov-Apostol was visited by a very well-known individual. He remembered a story that Matvei had told him, and that story opened his famous article 'Shame' against corporal punishment.

In the 1820s, the officers of the Semyonovsky Guards, the cream of the younger generation of the day, most of them masons, and later Decembrists, decided not to use corporal punishment in their regiment and, notwithstanding the harsh conditions of army service at the time, the Semyonovsky Guards though it had renounced the use of corporal punishment, remained a model regiment.

'One of the company commanders of that same Semyonovsky Guards, once met Sergei Ivanovich Muravyov, one of the finest people of his own, and indeed of any time, and told him about one of his soldiers, a thief and a drunkard, saying that such a soldier could be subdued only by the lash. Sergei Muravyov did not agree with him, and offered to take the soldier into his own company.

'The transfer was effected, and within the first few days the transferred soldier stole another soldier's boots, sold them, got drunk on the proceeds and started a brawl. Sergei Ivanovich lined up the company and, having called the soldier concerned out to the front, said to him: "You know that in my regiment we do not beat or whip, and I will not punish you. I myself will pay for the boots you stole, but I ask you, not for my sake but for your own sake, to think about your life and change it." And having finished this friendly admonition to the soldier, Sergei Ivanovich dismissed him.

'Once again the soldier got drunk and started a fight. Again he was not punished, but an attempt was made to talk to him: "You are only causing more harm to yourself; if you reform, you yourself will feel the benefit. So I ask you not to do that kind of thing any more."

'The soldier was so amazed at this new attitude towards him that he changed completely and became a model soldier.

'The one who told me this story, the brother of Sergei Ivanovich, Matvei Ivanovich, who, like his brother and

all the finest people of his time, considered corporal punishment to be a shameful survival from the age of savagery which demeaned not so much those who were punished as those who punished, was unable to hold back tears of emotion and admiration whenever he spoke of it. And the listener found it equally difficult.'

Note the words 'one of the finest people of his own, and indeed of any time'; not simply because the great Lev Tolstoy had words of praise for our hero, but because his opinion is particularly valuable, since Lev Nikolayevich did not share Sergei Ivanovich's basic ideas, considering revolt, uprising and the spilling of blood to be the wrong way to attain even the noblest of goals. All his life the writer was haunted by the temptation to write about the Decembrists—and time and again he pushed the idea away from him. The reasons for this were many—we have already mentioned 'French education'. One of the main reasons, however, was his disagreement in principle. Repeating time and again that 'the man who inflicts violence is less free than the man who suffers violence', Tolstoy lays aside the novel he has begun on the Decembrists, but a year or two later returns to it once more. Why? Because many of the Decembrists were fine and honest people, whose moral stance was precisely that which Tolstoy would dearly like to have seen adopted by everyone. Thus: blood and revolt—no; but what fine people! And what is one's attitude to be when the rebel is 'one of the finest people of his own, and indeed of any time'? Tolstoy could not resolve the contradiction. He was disturbed, even angry, but he could not forget.

How difficult it was for that officer when his beloved Semyonovsky regiment was handed over, at the beginning of 1820, to the cruel, Arakcheyev-type Fyodor Schwarz, who was informed that the officers of this regiment did not make use of corporal punishment. Schwarz also refrained from making use of it for the first few months, but then...

Displeased with their training, he lined them up facing each other, forcing the soldiers to spit at each other, and intensified parade drill.

Then, having realised that the soldiers had gone over to a new routine, the regimental commander reintroduced flogging, winning notoriety for what was in effect 'a graveyard nicknamed after him'. The regiment rebelled, the soldiers were imprisoned in the fortress and then expelled from the capital and sent to the south of the country, together with their officers. Thus the brothers Matvei and Sergei, having survived the war, found them-

selves in disgrace in a provincial backwater, far from the accustomed bustle of life in the capital. Meanwhile the youngest brother, Ippolit, was also growing up and also dreaming of displaying the same heroism and integrity as Sergei and Matvei. He dreamt of the time he would be able either to grapple with the enemy or rise in defence of the unfortunate soldiers.

Life is not easy for the three Muravyov-Apostol brothers. However, at this moment there appears beside Sergei a man who could also be considered his brother.

Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin

'Bestuzhev was an empty-headed fellow, a man of limited intellect, and all his companions constantly made fun of him, Sergei Muravyov more than all the rest. "I can hardly recognise you, brother," his brother Matvei Ivanovich Muravyov said to him once. "In making fun of Bestuzhev, you are demeaning yourself, and in what way is he to blame if he was born stupid?" After that, Sergei Muravyov's attitude to Bestuzhev changed completely, he began to seek his friendship and did all he could to wipe out the memory of his former behaviour towards him. Bestuzhev became attached to him, and he also came to be very fond of Bestuzhev.'

This incident, recorded by the son of one of the Decembrists, was undoubtedly taken down from the words of Matvei Ivanovich himself, and we may fully believe that the relationship began roughly as described; several of those who wrote their memoirs spoke of the naivety, eccentricity and exalted enthusiasm of Bestuzhev-Riumin and wondered at the strange friendship between the much-travelled and knowledgeable lieutenant-colonel and the inexperienced ensign. One of the group of companions commented: 'Sergei Muravyov and Bestuzhev-Riumin make, as it were, one man.'

Several years later, the following note will lie on the table of the secret Investigation Committee set up to inquire into the conspiracy case.

Bestuzhev-Riumin: 'I repeat here that, by my impetuosity I captivated Muravyov and drew him into all this criminal activity. This I am prepared, in the presence of the Committee, to prove to Muravyov himself by means of striking evidence. The only thing to which he agreed before our friendship was to enter the Society. His is not a dynamic character, and he always felt a revulsion towards harshness of any kind. Unfortunately,

Muravyov had too high an opinion of me, and trusted me more than he trusted himself. The whole Society knew this.'

This is the statement made to the Investigation Committee by an ensign of the Poltava infantry regiment who, in answer to the question in the official list: 'During your service, where and when have you taken part in campaigns and actions against the enemy?' replied briefly: 'None' (in 1812 Bestuzhev was 9 years old). He was, of course, striving to save, to protect, his best friend, but in the statement we have just quoted there is a great deal of truth. For the moment let us note only the style in which he writes—exalted, poetic—and his conviction that he understands more with the heart than others understand with their minds! Here begins the enigma of the peculiar charm of this young man.

Joseph Poggio, a member of the secret Southern Society, a retired staff-captain, and the son of an Italian father, has proposed to and been accepted by Maria Borozdina—against the wishes of her senator father. The happy Poggio is passing through the town and Bestuzhev-Riumin inquires of him whether there has been any change in his attitude to the Secret Society.

It was difficult for 33-year-old Staff-Captain Poggio to talk about such matters with a 24-year-old second lieutenant—and a possible in-law: the impetuous Bestuzhev-Riumin is also caught by that mischievous maiden, love, in the person of Yekaterina Andreyevna Borozdina, the senator's other daughter, the sister of Maria Poggio. However, the parents of the young man are of the opinion that at such a tender age and with such a humble rank one does not marry. Bestuzhev turns for help to his best friend, Muravyov-Apostol, who takes the matter in hand, leaving us the right to wonder whether the older man sought to dissuade the younger. Did he not reproach Bestuzhev—why marry, when perhaps we may all be 'not long for this world'? Or did the lieutenant-colonel keep his own counsel, knowing the fiery temperament of the lieutenant and not wishing to grieve him, fearing the destructive power of suppressed emotions?

Sergei Muravyov cannot state matters frankly to Bestuzhev's relatives, but the calm lines he addresses to Bestuzhev's parents contain what is almost an entreaty—look at him anew, see just a fraction of the extraordinary nature I see in him! 'How many people squander in criminal excesses the energy inherent in their character which, had it found a better outlet, could have been useful, but which society did not recognise and offended.

This is no exaggeration; who has not felt, in the course of his life, a sense of despair upon looking at the way society is organised? Of course, there are people who are so fortunately endowed that even this school is favourable to them, but how many others are there who become its victims? I have often talked of this with Bestuzhev, who also has a certain right to discuss this issue; it is to this harsh school that he owes his precocious experience and that keenness of observation which amazes all who know him. What I am saying here is also a mark of my gratitude; it is my pleasure to give it, for he has often been of service to me with his advice in various circumstances, which has made it both customary and necessary for me to consult with him.'

A relative, a cousin who enjoyed a certain authority, answers Bestuzhev-Riumin on behalf of his parents (mentioning the hint the latter had dropped to the effect that his bride-to-be was not easily frightened): 'The young lady whom at present nothing frightens is deceiving herself as regards the future, just as you are, and she will regret it, just as you will; however, when you have a little experience you know that this is a language common to all young people who wish to marry. If the lover tells his beloved that two days after their wedding he must leave for the depths of Siberia, I can predict the answer: she will be happy to follow him into exile, for love adorns even the desert, and all the fine words to which inexperience alone lends any meaning?'

Who can say whether the cousin did not later regret not helping at least to bring about a situation in which Michel Bestuzhev-Riumin, finding himself in Siberia, would have been joined there by Katya Borozdina. He really had no desire to plead their cause to Bestuzhev's parents.

The parents refused to give their blessing, and in despair the young officer wrote to his cousin: 'You cannot imagine the dreadful future that awaits me. Fortunately, I have beside me a friend who shares my sorrow; to console me would be beyond his powers. Do not think that I wish to frighten you with hints about suicide. No. I will make no attempt on my life, to which may be joined the life of my ageing parents. The cause of my parents' behaviour is, in my opinion, their conviction that I am an idiot whom anyone can make use of in his own interests. I do not know if there is any consolation in such a view of a 24-year-old son, but I would like to believe that such a view is unjust.'

Would marriage have tamed the impassioned conspirator?

Who can say?

During the inquiry he will say, en passant, that life had some time ago ceased to have any value for him. A year and a half later, in August 1825, the object of his affections, Katya Borozdina, will marry Vladimir Likharev, also a second lieutenant and also, alas, a conspirator who will be arrested five months later; however, the wife does not follow her husband, as she had promised her first fiance; taking advantage of the right to divorce a state criminal, she will marry once more and will never again see Likharev, who will be killed in the war in the Caucasus. Likharev himself never saw but only indirectly heard about his son, Nikolai, born after his arrest.

Meanwhile Bestuzhev-Riumin's extraordinary energy appears to double. 'I, experienced, I, past master.' With this line from Voltaire's *Tancrede* he was to conclude his letter should it be necessary to warn the Polish conspirators in Warsaw where, in 1821, young officers had established their own revolutionary organisation, the Patriotic Society. When they met, the Decembrist General Yushnevsky warmly embraced the second lieutenant who had succeeded in linking up the Russian and Polish secret societies.

He is tireless, indomitable, undaunted by obstacles, ready at any moment to leave for Moscow, Kiev, Poland—wherever necessary (fortunately he has little difficulty in obtaining permission to travel: his regimental commander is also a member of the Secret Society). Today Bestuzhev-Riumin is conferring with Muravyov-Apostol over the plan to abduct or assassinate the Emperor when he next reviews the troops. Tomorrow he is telling the Poles: 'Russia prefers to have grateful allies rather than secret enemies, and after its transformation will grant Poland independence. The Russian-Polish border will be redrawn, and areas not russified sufficiently to ensure their spiritual attachment to the welfare of Russia, will be returned to Poland.'

Bestuzhev-Riumin, the meteor with a briefcase always filled with forbidden poetry, travelled extensively in the south of Russia and suddenly discovered the secret revolutionary Society of United Slavs, totally unknown to him and his companions, and, together with his friend Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, brings his new friends into the Southern Society and goes to report on this to Pestel himself.

Colonel Pestel

Colonel Pestel was the recognised leader of the southern conspirators and, like Muravyov and Lunin, a man who had received an outstanding education, who had distinguished himself in campaigns against Napoleon, had been wounded and decorated; his father had for many years occupied major positions of state: first as the director of the postal services, in which capacity he had opened and copied for the Tsars numerous letters; then as the all-powerful governor of Siberia, where for many years he had plundered that vast region, larger than Western Europe, with impunity—all complaints had been intercepted and the complainants harassed. With such a father, such a career and such abilities, 28-year-old Colonel Pestel could confidently expect to be raised to the rank of general within a few years, and later to occupy the highest posts of the empire. Yet time and again the powerful magnetism of the age drew into conspiracy and death people who seemed the most prosperous and successful. Later, when the investigators, Pestel's former army and wartime comrades, ask him why he chose the path he did, the colonel answers: 'The events of 1812, 13, 14 and 15, as the events of the times that preceded and the times that followed, left so many thrones overturned, so many others erected, so many kingdoms destroyed, so many new ones created, so many monarchs exiled, so many others restored or summoned back and then again expelled, so many revolutions accomplished, so many coups carried through, that all these events acquainted people's minds with revolutions and with the opportunities and methods of making them. Besides, every age has its own distinguishing characteristic. The present age is marked by revolutionary ideas. From one end of Europe to the other one may see the same thing everywhere, from Portugal to Russia, not excluding a single state, even such opposites as England and Turkey. The same spectacle is offered by America. The spirit of change is, so to speak, provoking a ferment of minds.'

The resolute, precise, mathematical mind of Pestel (his companions joked: nicknamed him 'the German mind', a reference to his father's German origins) led to his early recognition as the leader of the Southern Society. His prestige was enormous. Some of his friends noted that the colonel bore a strong resemblance to Napoleon—and might, by virtue of his qualities, become supreme dictator should the revolution be victorious; Pestel

was disappointed to hear such a comment and said that on the day after the revolution he would retire to a monastery.

'So that the crowd can come and carry you out on their shoulders,' retorted his 'subordinates'.

For many years he worked on his constitution for Russia, *Russkaya Pravda*, (*Russian Law*), far more radical than the constitution drawn up by Nikita Muravyov. Nikita was a supporter of constitutional monarchy; Pestel was a convinced republican, and planned with rigid, mathematical precision how to wipe out the whole royal family after the uprising in order to prevent any restoration. Nikita planned to give only a modest portion of the land to the free peasants; Pestel wished to see a radical agrarian reform. Under Pestel's command were many daredevil officers and several generals.

When the brilliant general, Prince Volkonsky, marries the 18-year-old Maria Rayevskaya, the father of the bride, the well-known hero of 1812 General Nikolai Rayevsky, demanded that the groom give his solemn word never to take part in conspiracies. Volkonsky gives his word, but Pestel comes to the wedding and reminds Volkonsky of a vow he had made earlier—to belong to the secret society.

The first vow takes precedence over the second.

Bestuzhev-Riumin (during the inquiry): 'Pestel was respected in the Society for his unusual talents, but a lack of sensitivity was the reason why he was not loved. He repelled everyone with his extreme distrustfulness, for one could not be sure that one's relationship with him would last any length of time. Everything caused him to be suspicious, and this led him to make many mistakes. He knew little about people. In trying to understand him, I became convinced of the truth that there are things which can only be understood by the heart, but which remain forever mysteries even for the most penetrating mind.'

This statement is typical of Bestuzhev-Riumin: he and Sergei Muravyov argue with Pestel over many things. They believe that the uprising should take place immediately, in the south, without waiting for St Petersburg; the spark will spread and ignite the whole army, the whole country. However, these exalted and powerful sentiments immediately come up against the iron logic of Pestel: is it our fault that we serve in the south, and not in St Petersburg? If we rise first, the Tsar will hear of it a few days later, and state couriers will ride post-haste to every corner of the country and will read out

to the people in the churches, and to regiments and divisions, a manifesto from the Tsar about traitors and rebels, and brother will fight brother, blood will be shed, and there is no knowing how it will all end. Is that really what Muravyov and Bestuzhev want? Would it not be easier, better, to wipe out the Romanovs in the capital, and then—a quick and bloodless revolution?

Sergei: 'I held firm to my opinion, although they put before me all the horrors of internecine warfare which must inevitably follow upon the course of action I proposed.' A vote was taken. Bestuzhev and Muravyov were opposed by four colonels and generals. Finding themselves in the minority, they declare: 'We suggest that this proposal be left to another time, as a question of such importance cannot be decided by six people.' All agreed.

Both sides in the dispute were saddened by such sharp differences of opinion so long before success. One of Pestel's aides will recall that, at the beginning of 1825, the colonel spoke to him of his wish to leave the society. Another about the same time declared: 'Pestel ... often said to me out of the friendship that unites us that he was quietly dissociating himself from the society, that it was childish nonsense which could destroy us, and that they could go ahead and do whatever they wished.'

In the spring of 1825, Pestel was drawn to religion, as is apparent from his correspondence with his parents. After a break of five years he went to confession and received communion.

Sergei Muravyov also became despondent.

'For the sake of his country,' recalled a contemporary, 'Sergei Muravyov-Apostol was prepared to sacrifice everything; but it all still appeared to him so far off in the future that he began to lose patience; in just such a moment he once gave expression to his feelings in pencil on the wall of a Kiev monastery.' The Decembrist Likharev, (the unfortunate husband of Yekaterina Borozdina) discovered this inscription, and later the second cousin of the composer, Mikhail Lunin, translated these lines from French into Russian.

*In pensive mood alone I'll walk the earth,
To no man known,
And only when I die
'Twill dawn upon the world
Whom it has lost.¹*

¹ Tr. by Irina Zheleznova.

On the night of 14-15 September 1825, in a small Ukrainian village, Sergei Muravyov talked with a group of impassioned young members of the Society of United Slavs who were ready, that very moment, to go with him and Bestuzhev into hell itself. One of them, the young artillery officer Ivan Gorbachevsky, immediately attracted Muravyov-Apostol, perhaps because of his fine literary style and good memory. Fifty years later the aged Gorbachevsky will remember Sergei Ivanovich: 'A strange thing, while we were talking in his tent I picked up his hairbrush without thinking and held it in my hands; as we said farewell I put it back on his table; he, noticing this, picked up the brush as we spoke, began to stroke my side-whiskers with it, kissed me warmly and said:

"Take this brush as a memento of me." Then he added: "If one of us should remain alive, we must commit our reminiscences to paper; if you survive, I both order you as your leader in our Society and ask you as a friend whom I love almost as much as Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin, to write about the aims and the purpose of our Society, about our secret designs, about our dedication and love of our neighbour, about our sacrifice for Russia and the Russian people. See that you carry out my behest if, of course, you have the opportunity." At that point he embraced me, was silent for a long while, and having finally embraced once more in sadness at our parting, we left, never to meet again...

'I do not remember how I came to put the brush in the side pocket of my greatcoat (when I visited Muravyov-Apostol I was wearing my uniform and it was raining—that, I think, is how it came to be in my greatcoat), and it remained in that pocket up to my arrest, probably because I paid little attention to it—I had other things to think about. Thus it travelled with me, now under arrest, and arrived in St Petersburg; the long journey and time must have caused the pocket to tear, and the brush fell through into the bottom of the coat, between the cloth and the lining. Just imagine, this brush survived all the searches in the palace, in the Peter-and-Paul and Schliesselburg fortresses, in Keksholm and Siberia, has remained with me to this day and is with me now. The Decembrist Trubetskoy did everything he could to persuade me to part with it, finally offering me 500 silver roubles for it and writing that, should I ever think of selling it or giving it away, to be sure that it went to him. Poggio, who last saw me in Verkhne-Udinsk in 1859, suggested either that I take 1,000 silver roubles

for it, or that I simply give it to him as a memento for his daughter, Varvara. By now almost all the bristles have fallen out of it, I don't know why, and virtually all that is left is wood; but I cannot part with it, so precious is it to me, despite all the would-be purchasers (and they are many) and my own financial difficulties.'

Thus passions flared and dimmed in the south of Russia, at a time when the main events were nonetheless taking place in the north, in the capital.

2

The Right to Die



Kondrati Ryleyev

Kondrati Ryleyev was a very different type of person from Lunin, the Muravyovs or Pestel: these came from the upper echelons of the aristocracy, served in the Guards, were wealthy and well-educated. In contrast, Ryleyev, was the son of a poor squire, a humble artillery officer whose wide reading and philosophical reflections were the result of his own efforts. Having retired from the army, he went to live on his estate near the capital, began to write poetry, married... However, his firmness, integrity and blameless life proved so remarkable that his neighbours elected him a member of the criminal court. His friends recalled that once a man, a commoner, was arrested on suspicion of a serious offence and brought before the military governor. He was questioned, but as the degree of his guilt could be established only by his own confession, the governor threatened him with every penalty if he did not admit to his guilt. The man was innocent, and did not wish to assume responsibility for the crime; the governor, exasperated by his denials, declared that he would send him before the criminal court, knowing how unwillingly the Russian commoner entrusted his fate to a court. He thought that fear of facing court would cause the man to confess the truth, but instead the man fell at his feet and, weeping tears of gratitude, thanked him for his mercy.

'What mercy have I shown you?' asked the governor.

'You have handed my case over to the court', answered the man, 'and now I know my sufferings will come to an end... I know that I will be vindicated: Ryleyev is a court assessor, he will not let an innocent man perish.'

'A martyr for the truth' was how Ryleyev's friends described him because he could not bear the sight of injustice. If he saw a scoundrel he would beat him, would spit in his face; he was involved in numerous duels. If he saw some unfortunate wretch, he would give him everything and take up his case, regardless of the time it took. Frequently he was tricked. 'Experience,' his friends recalled, 'taught him nothing at all. He saw everything through the rose-coloured glasses of his own magnanimous soul. Only his own modesty and shyness saved him.'

However, the day finally came when Ryleyev realised that the whole of Russia was sunk in misery, that many of those

who ran it were scoundrels; here too Ryleyev was true to himself: if that is the case, we must rebel, liberate, even if it means death. Thanks to his energy, his will-power, his gift of oratory and his poetical talent, the 28-year-old retired officer and court assessor suddenly becomes the recognised leader of the St Petersburg conspirators, who before his appearance had become somewhat passive and dispirited (particularly after such energetic members as Pestel, Lunin and the Muravyovs had left the capital).

At one point Ryleyev composed some verse and showed them to a friend: it was the confession of a historical personage from the late 16th century, a man preparing to rise in rebellion, and it spoke of the premonition of inescapable death, the fate that inevitably awaits he who is the first to rebel. However, liberty cannot be won without sacrifice, and the hero joyfully blesses his destiny.

'Do you realise,' said the friend, 'how prophetic those lines are for you and for all of us. It is as if you wish to point to your own fate in these lines.'

'Do you really think I ever doubted, even for a moment, what my fate would be,' said Ryleyev. 'Believe me, every day convinces me of the necessity of what I am doing, of the approaching death with which we must pay for our first attempt to free Russia, and at the same time of the need of providing an example that will arouse the sleeping people of Russia.'

Then the moment came: in November 1825 Tsar Alexander I died unexpectedly. He left no children; the oath of loyalty was taken to the next brother, Constantine, the legitimate successor, but he did not wish to ascend the throne and therefore a new oath had to be taken to the third brother, Nicholas.

Discussions over the succession led to an interregnum for several weeks, and the members of the Secret Society decided that the time was opportune. On the eve of 14 December 1825, the date set for the taking of the second oath, everyone gathered at Ryleyev's flat. Those rooms not occupied by his wife and 5-year-old daughter were filled to overflowing with dozens of conspirators. One of those involved later recalled that 'the numerous assembly was in a feverish and exalted mood. Reckless pronouncements and impracticable suggestions were made, impossible instructions given, words without deeds...

'But how magnificent was Ryleyev on that evening! He was not a handsome man, his simple speech lacked fluency; but when he launched into his favourite theme, love for his country, his face lit up, his eyes, black as pitch, shone with an unearthly light, his words flowed like burning lava

and then one could listen to him forever... On that fateful evening his face, pale as the moon but lit up by some supernatural light, would first appear then disappear amidst the stormy sea of seething passions and emotions.'

At one point someone expressed doubts as to whether they had enough forces for uprising on the following day, and whether it was well-planned. Ryleyev sighed and said that perhaps they would all die, 'but we must still go ahead!'

Alongside Ryleyev there stood one of the most sombre and tragic people present that evening.

Pyotr Kakhovsky

A few days later, during the inquiry, Pyotr Kakhovsky will be asked: 'When and where did you acquire your liberal ideas?' Kakhovsky will answer: 'Ideas are formed over the years; I cannot say precisely when my ideas began to form. From childhood I studied the history of the Greeks and the Romans and I was fired by the heroes of antiquity. The recent upheavals in the governments of Europe had a powerful effect on me. Finally, reading all political literature known in the world directed my thoughts. While I was abroad in 1823 and 1824 I had many opportunities to read and study; solitude, observation and reading were my teachers.'

He will not tell the investigators and judges what lies concealed behind the word 'solitude': loneliness, poverty, the loss of almost all his relatives and friends. For a short moment the phantom of love appeared in the form of a lovely young girl, the daughter of the wealthy Prince Saltykov; but, first attracted by the daring and romantic biography, the tragic features and menacing premonitions of Kakhovsky, the girl then takes fright and leaves her Don Quixote (as she called him) to seek a quieter and more comfortable haven. The list of sorrows suffered by Pyotr Kakhovsky grew, and so did his resolve. On that evening at Ryleyev's flat, it was from him that many expected the most reckless and decisive actions. Ryleyev embraced him. 'You are, after all, alone on this earth.' And indeed, on the following day, Kakhovsky's determination will be frightening...

Three thousand soldiers led by a few dozen officers will emerge onto Senate Square, refuse to take the oath to the new Tsar, Nicholas I, and, under the guise of loyalty to Tsar Constantine (the oath to him already taken), will attempt to seize power.

Early that morning Ryleyev's friends come to his flat and he informs them that he is preparing to go to the

square 'with a bag across my shoulder and a rifle in my hands.'

'What, in your dress-coat!'

'Yes, or perhaps I'll put on a Russian *kaftan* so as to draw the soldier and the villager together in the first act of their shared liberty.'

'I wouldn't advise you to do that,' answers his friend, Nikolai Bestuzhev. 'The Russian soldier does not understand such nuances of patriotism, and you are more likely to run the risk of being struck with a rifle butt than to evoke sympathy for your well-intentioned but inappropriate action. Why such a masquerade? It is not yet the time for a National Guard.'

Ryleyev pondered.

'Yes, it is excessively romantic,' he said. 'So we'll do things simply, without excesses, without games. Perhaps,' he continued, 'perhaps our dreams will come true; but no, it is more likely, much more likely, that we will all perish.'

He sighed, embraced Bestuzhev warmly, they said farewell and prepared to leave. However, a painful scene then took place. Ryleyev's wife ran after them, and when Bestuzhev turned to greet her, she seized his hand and, sobbing, barely managed to say:

'Leave me my husband, don't take him away—I know he is going to his death.'

'Those of my companions,' Nikolai Bestuzhev will write later, 'who experienced the feelings that animated each of us during those unforgettable days will be able to imagine that, tense with excitement, we were ready for any sacrifice, and therefore I attempted to persuade her, using words that assumed that a wife and mother must be able to understand my feelings, but such words appeared cold to her. Ryleyev also attempted to calm her, assuring her that he would shortly return, that his intentions involved nothing dangerous. She did not listen to us, but all the time we were speaking, she turned the wild, sorrowful and probing glance of her large black eyes first on one then on the other. I could not withstand that look and felt confused. Ryleyev was clearly upset. Suddenly she cried out, her voice full of despair:

"Nastenka, plead with your father for yourself and for me!"

'The little girl ran out weeping, clasped her arms round her father's knees, and her mother, almost fainting, fell onto his breast. Ryleyev laid her on the couch, tore himself from her arms and those of his daughter and ran out.'

And here they are standing on the square on a cold win-

ter's day, standing immobile, waiting for more regiments to join them, and then everything will be decided without bloodshed.

The governor-general of St Petersburg, Miloradovich, rides up to the soldiers. Addressing them with the self-assurance of an experienced father-commander, the count tells them that he himself would very much have liked to see Constantine as Emperor, but what could be done if he had refused; he assured them that he himself had seen the new abdication and persuaded them to believe him. One of the members of the Secret Society, seeing that such a speech might have its effect, stepped out of the formation and began to persuade the count to leave. Since the count was not paying any attention, he wounded him slightly in the side with his sword. Kakhovsky, however, shot him with his pistol. The count swayed, his cap fell from his head, he collapsed onto the pommel of his saddle, and in this position his horse carried him off the square.

Kakhovsky killed the governor-general and then a colonel who also rode up to the insurgents. Other generals came, the brother of the Tsar tried to talk to them, members of the clergy approached them: they chased them all away! However, time was passing. No further regiments rebelled, the Tsar drew up loyal divisions, the artillery, and they opened fire. Blood spurted over the square and stained the ice on the Neva. The insurgents dispersed. The attempt to change Russian life, to free the peasants 35 years and to proclaim a constitution 80 years before these things actually happened, to give the people a new history, all had failed!

On the evening of 14 December, Nicholas I begins his long letter to his brother Constantine in Warsaw. However, he is constantly interrupted: arrested soldiers and officers are brought into the large room next door, Lieutenant-General Vasili Vasilyevich Levashov, a skilled interrogator, rapidly questions them, the arrested men, together with their statements, are immediately sent before the young Tsar, and Nicholas writes down more names of people to be arrested on any pieces of paper that happen to be at hand. Levashov seals the paper, which then becomes an order, and the chief of city police accompanied by Cossacks, rides off to bring them in. Only on the night of 15 December, after seven attempts, was Nicholas able to finish and send to his brother a letter resembling a report on events.

The first part of the letter, the earliest, ends with the words: 'At the present time we have in our hands three of the main leaders and they are being questioned here at the palace.'

At this point Nicholas had to break off for the first time. 'A little later'—thus begins the second part of the letter. 'A little later'—that is, one may assume, after he had stopped writing to attend the first interrogations. However, during that interval the Tsar had obtained an important piece of information: 'We have evidence that the affair was led by a certain Ryleyev, a civilian, in whose flat secret meetings were held, and that many others like him are members of the gang.'

At '11.30 in the evening' Nicholas returns for the third time to his letter to Constantine: 'They have just brought Ryleyev in to me, a capture of capital importance.'

The letter to Constantine continues for a few more lines—Ryleyev must surely have been standing in front of the Tsar, who carried on writing. Then the letter was laid aside, and Adjutant-Generals Levashov, Toll and Benkendorf emerge from different rooms to begin the interrogation...

Ryleyev's wife had not expected him to return alive from the square, but he returned. Later other insurgents appeared at his flat. What did they talk about? They did not wish to flee, anyway they felt that would be beneath them; they brooded over their defeat and, of course, discussed the fact that the police would arrive at any minute... Then they left.

The early dusk of St Petersburg thickened. All night ghosts wandered the dark streets of the city. Kakhovsky was also restless—he returned once more to Ryleyev's flat, and saw Cossacks near the house. He went back home, and there they were waiting for him, too.

Ryleyev was brought into the palace exhausted, having slept no more than a few hours over the course of several days, shaken by defeat and a second farewell to his family.

The interrogation was brief: at 11.30 he was taken in to the Tsar, and by 12 o'clock Nicholas was already writing a note to the commandant of the Peter-and-Paul fortress: 'The man being sent to you, Ryleyev, is to be placed in the Alexeyevsky ravelin (the most dreadful section of the fortress), but with his hands unbound, and is to have no communication with the others. He is to be given writing paper, and anything he writes is to be handed to me personally every day.'

A similar document is sent with Pyotr Kakhovsky... Special government couriers are dispatched to various corners of the empire where illustrious conspirators, in service or retired, are living at that moment: Pestel, the Muravyov-Apostols and Bestuzhev-Riumin in the south, Lunin in Warsaw, Nikita Muravyov in a village a few hundred kilometres outside Moscow.

The Southern Finale

Information against Pestel had led to his arrest before the uprising. He just had time to pass on a message to save the *Russkaya Pravda*, and the secret republican constitution was wrapped up in an oil cloth and buried near the village of Kirsanovka in the Ukraine.

Meanwhile the youngest brother, Ippolit Muravyov-Apostol, who is not yet 20 years old and has just been made an officer, is on his way from St Petersburg to visit Sergei and Matvei. On the road he is overtaken by a troika with a gendarme on it carrying the warrant for the arrest and transfer to the capital of the two elder Muravyov-Apostol brothers.

Sergei and Matvei Muravyov-Apostol are staying at army corps headquarters in the Ukrainian town of Zhitomir where, although deeply perturbed by news of the uprising on 14 December in St Petersburg, Sergei Ivanovich is joking and laughing at a Christmas dinner given by his mortal enemy, General Roth. The brothers then hurry to the regiment of Hussars under the command of their cousin, Artamon Muravyov. Only a few months previously, Artamon had sworn that, if necessary, he would raise his regiment in revolt and himself destroy the Tsar.

The conversation between the two brothers is interrupted by the appearance of Bestuzhev-Riumin.

'There is a warrant out for your arrest,' he tells Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, still gasping for breath. 'All your papers have been seized by the regimental commander, who is now on his way here with the gendarmes.'

The news came like a bolt from the blue for the two brothers.

'It's all over,' exclaimed Matvei Muravyov. 'We are finished, a dreadful fate awaits us; would it not be better to die? Order supper and champagne to be served,' he continued, turning to Artamon Muravyov. 'We'll have a drink and be merry when we shoot ourselves.'

'Are you not being a little hasty?' said Sergei Muravyov, somewhat chagrined.

'We will die just at the right time,' rejoined Matvei. 'Remember, brother, that we four are the leading members, and that by dying we can conceal from the government those who are less well-known.'

'That is partly true,' answered Sergei Muravyov. 'However, we are not the only leading members of the Society. I have decided on a different course of action. Artamon can change the situation.'

The plan devised by Sergei Muravyov-Apostol was quite

clear: cousin Artamon would raise his regiment in revolt. Another regiment would follow. Then the two regiments of Hussars would occupy Zhitomir, arrest General Roth and take over the army corps; it was only 20 versts to the artillery brigade in which their friends from the Society of United Slavs were serving, and Sergei Muravyov would write them an order to begin the uprising and march on Zhitomir...

Colonel Artamon Muravyov, however, refuses to raise his regiment in revolt, refuses to join with the artillery officers, and even refuses to give Sergei and Matvei fresh horses.

'I am leaving this instant for St Petersburg, to see the Tsar,' says Artamon, 'and I will tell him everything about the Society, the purpose for which it was created, what it planned to do and what it hoped for. I am certain that when the Tsar learns of your well-intentioned and patriotic plans he will leave you in your present positions, and there will doubtless be those in his entourage who will support you.'

'I have been sorely mistaken about you,' retorts Sergei Muravyov-Apostol bitterly. 'Your behaviour as regards our Society can only be totally condemned. You should have withdrawn earlier, and not at the decisive moment.'

Bitterly disillusioned, the Muravyov brothers and Bestuzhev-Riumin take their leave. The hunt catches up with the Muravyovs and they are captured. But at that moment four officers arrive, fellow members of the Secret Society, who arrest the arrestors and free the brothers. The most reckless of the four is Ivan Sukhinov.

Now there is no going back: on the eve of the new year of 1826, in the small town of Vasilkov near Kiev, the second, southern uprising begins; the entire Chernigovsky regiment rises in revolt and is prepared to follow Muravyov, prepared for revolution.

The 30 and 31 December 1825 are joyful days. A snow-storm is blowing. Just outside the town of Vasilkov, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol embraces Bestuzhev-Riumin, who has just appeared unexpectedly. Then he addresses two companies: 'Brothers, we are setting out on a noble cause.'

Like Napoleon during the hundred days, Major Trukhin, a man thoroughly disliked by the soldiers of the Chernigovsky regiment, goes out onto Bazaar Square and attempts to disarm the insurgents with words, but as he approaches the soldiers he is seized by Bestuzhev-Riumin and Sukhinov

who, making fun of his attempts at oratory, push him into the centre of the column of troops. The erstwhile peaceableness of the soldiers disappears immediately: they rush at the major, tear off his epaulettes, rip his uniform and shower him with curses and ridicule. It is only Sergei Muravyov-Apostol who manages to save Trukhin from further unpleasantness: having come onto the square with his column of soldiers, he orders them not to touch the major but to take him under arrest to the guard-room.

The soldiers laugh, shout 'Hurrah!', fraternise with each other—for, indeed, who would shoot at his fellows?—and are absolutely convinced that this is how things will be henceforth.

The released detainees are laughing, a young officer is laughing and kissing his troops, explaining to them that soon the period of military service will be reduced from 25 to 5 or 10 years. Two officers, previously demoted, are also laughing as they get back their officer's stripes and swords.

Everyone is laughing: at the gates of the town two gendarmes appear to take the Muravyov-Apostol brothers. They have with them warrants for their arrest and 900 roubles. However, they have not secured a warrant for the arrest of the entire regiment. The papers are burned and the money distributed among the soldiers, who go off to warm themselves up in the local inns.

The city fathers are frightened; Sergei Muravyov-Apostol orders them to be reassured, gives out receipts for requisitioned food supplies, and they also begin to smile nervously.

Ivan Sukhinov forgets about his seven old wounds (in the arm, the shoulder, the head), received at Leipzig and in other battles of the war; the happiest days of his life are beginning.

Only a few hours have passed since the uprising, but already the name of Sukhinov carries almost as much weight in the town as that of Muravyov-Apostol. It is he who commanded the vanguard troops who entered the town, he who stripped the epaulettes off the shoulders of major Trukhin. It is he who watches to see if anyone is thinking of running away to join the enemy, and who comes to the lodgings of a terrified second lieutenant to see that he 'does not lag behind the regiment'. When Sergei Muravyov-Apostol gives the second lieutenant an important mission to perform, Sukhinov adds that, should he run away and hide, he will catch him and 'take his life'. Sukhinov's sabre is always unsheathed. It is he who seizes the regimental banners and the regimental funds. However,

when a group of soldiers set off for the house of the former commander, to his terrified wife and children, Sukhinov declares that he will execute all those who, having forgotten military discipline, left their ranks without permission from an officer and 'dare to disturb the peace of a poor woman, insult her, and even plan a disgusting murder'. Seeing, however, that his words are having no effect, he decides to back them up with action and to deal out instant punishment to the first offender. The infuriated soldiers decide to defend themselves, parrying his sabre blows with their bayonets and clearly revealing that they are ready to kill their favourite officer. Sukhinov does not lose his nerve but hurls himself at their bayonets, striking out with his sabre at all those who are threatening to kill him, and chases them all out of the house.

At the guard-house, Major Trukhin, terrified for his life, continually pleads for mercy. On seeing this, Sukhinov begins to upbraid him for debasing himself before his superiors and ill-treating his soldiers, and advises him to take off the uniform he has disgraced with his base behaviour and leave the service. Trukhin agrees with everything that Sukhinov said, swears that he will leave the army, and then suddenly falls on his knees before Sukhinov and begins to plead:

'Dear Ivan Ivanovich, have pity on me!'

At first Sukhinov cannot understand what it is he wants.

'Dear Ivan Ivanovich, have pity on me, send me a bottle of rum,' answered Trukhin.

The entire guard-house bursts into laughter.

'Corporal,' calls out Sukhinov, 'send to my quarters for a bottle of rum for the major, and in future, even if he should want a whole barrel of vodka here at the guard-house, let him have it to console himself with.'

A month later, when the uprising has been put down, Tsar Nicholas I will make Trukhin a colonel and put him in command of the Chernigovsky regiment.

The companies are lined up in a column. Sergei Muravyov-Apostol greets the soldiers, explains to them briefly the aim of the uprising, and says what a noble thing it is to sacrifice one's life for freedom. Caught up in a wave of enthusiasm, the officers and soldiers express their readiness to go with their beloved and respected commander wherever he might go. Then Muravyov-Apostol turns to the priest and asks him to read out the chatechism they had drawn up—the revolutionary proclamation.

'On 31 December 1825, the terrified inhabitants of Vasilkov witnessed an astonishing spectacle. At two o'clock on a winter's day on the town square, Jesus

Christ was proclaimed to be the one and only Tzar of the Universe.' Thus did one historian begin his account of the unusual document which was read over and copied out one long December night by the regimental clerks.

On the unpaved square in front of the Cathedral of St Feodosi, the five companies of the Chernigovsky regiment, 60 musicians carrying weapons instead of instruments, and 14 officers along with the Muravyov brothers and Bestuzhev-Riumin, all line up. The young priest, himself from the aristocracy, hesitates: he knows full well the aim of the insurgents. He tells Muravyov that he is willing to die for the general good, but he is afraid for his wife and children:

'If your enterprise should fail, what will become of them? Poverty, destitution, even shame, await my wife and fatherless children.'

The priest is about to go back on his earlier promise, but Muravyov manages to convince him and, in order further to reassure him, gives him 200 roubles:

'Give this money to your family, they will need it during your absence, and meanwhile rest assured that neither Russia nor I will ever forget your services.'

The priest makes no further objections and goes with the Muravyovs onto the square.

(Later he will be defrocked and stripped of his noble rank, and will spend 30 years begging for a living.)

'The priest read out loudly and clearly,' affirmed the officers who, later, helped Ivan Gorbachevsky to compile the chronicle of events. However, those at the back had greater difficulty hearing.

The Orthodox catechism.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Question: Why did God create man?

Answer: To believe in Him, and to be free and happy.

Question: What does it mean to be free and happy?

Answer: Without freedom there is no happiness.

Question: Why are the Russian people and the Russian army unhappy?

Answer: Because the tsars have robbed them of their freedom.

Question: Does this mean that the tsars have acted against the will of God?

Answer: Yes... Christ said: You cannot serve both God and mammon. Therefore the Russian people and the Russian army suffer...

Question: What does the law of God order the Russian

people and the Russian army to do?

Answer: To repent of their long servility and, rising up against tyranny and deceit, to solemnly proclaim: Let there be but one Tsar for all in heaven and on earth—Jesus Christ.

Question: What can prevent us from performing this sacred task?

Answer: Nothing...

The words 'tsar', 'tsars' ring out 19 times across the square, and the words 'tyrant' and 'tyranny'—five times.

'Does this mean that God does not love tsars?'

'Yes, it does. They are accursed...'

'Jesus Christ alone should be our tsar.'

They are called upon to 'take up arms and boldly follow the speaker in the name of the Lord...

'And he who stays behind will, like the traitor Judas, be accursed and anathemised.'

It is as if an ancient tongue had come back to life, and again there a crusade is to be proclaimed against tyranny in the name of the Lord. Sergei Muravyov and Bestuzhev-Riumin prepared quotations from the Old and New Testament which served to justify revolution, and were caught up in the spirit of these ancient writings. It has long been known that in many famous uprisings and campaigns which had perfectly rational and comprehensible historical causes, the final impulse came not from logic, but from emotion, occasionally from mysticism, even shamanism, which led people to forget the arguments for and against... Thousands marched behind Peter the Hermit, tens of thousands of Germans reformed Christianity without probing into the finer details of Luther's captivating words. The popular Russian rebel leader, Yemelyan Pugachev, showed the 'royal marks' on his chest and the Cossacks, seduced by his sweet promises, followed him.

The young and inexperienced second lieutenant, Bestuzhev-Riumin, enthralls and captivates the older, more experienced officers; it is, of course, he who had insisted on the reading of the Catechism, despite the objections of Matvei Muravyov.

Sergei Muravyov-Apostol steps out to speak after the priest, and the soldiers of the Chernigovsky regiment greet him with cries of 'hurrah'.

'Our cause,' Muravyov tells the soldiers after the text had been read, 'is so lofty and so noble that it must not be tainted by any compulsion, and therefore if any among you, officers or men, feel unable to join such an undertaking, let him leave the ranks immediately; he may remain without fear in the town, if only his conscience does not

trouble him and reproach him for having abandoned his companions in such a difficult and glorious task, when our native land calls for the help of each of her sons.'

His last words are drowned by loud exclamations.

The effect created by this dramatic scene is further enhanced by the unexpected arrival of a young officer who throws himself into the arms of Sergei Ivanovich. This is the youngest of the Muravyovs, Ippolit. He explains that he left St Petersburg on 13 December, having been instructed by the members of the Northern Society to inform the Southern Society about their plans to begin the uprising in the capital, and to suggest that they also take action. But while on his way, he has learned about the tragic events of 14 December.

'My arrival here among you during the solemn moment of prayer,' Ippolit declares, 'has compelled me to forget all that has happened. Perhaps your enterprise will succeed, but if I have been deceived in my hopes, I will not survive a second failure, and I vow by my honour that I will drop down dead on the fatal spot.'

It seemed to the young officers that they were watching a scene out of the history of medieval Russia or ancient Rome. Three brothers, the cathedral, prayers, freedom. However, according to other witnesses, the soldiers had difficulty hearing what was read out to them. During the inquiry, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol admitted: 'Having noted that the reading of the Catechism had produced an unfavourable impression on the soldiers, I decided to act once more in the name of Grand Prince Constantine Pavlovich.' What is more, his brother Ippolit often heard this opinion voiced on his way from St Petersburg. In Russia, the tsar was more important than God. Belief in a 'good' Tsar or a tsar liberator had inspired nearly all popular movements in Russia from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Dozens of tsareviches or tsars who had escaped impending death—Dmitris and Alexeis, false Peters, false Pavels, false Constantines...

However, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol does not or cannot thus deceive his own men. He believes that one company can take the regiment with it. If the Chernigovsky regiment rebels, others will follow.

There is hope, and the peasants come to wish the insurgents a happy new year: 'May God help you, good Colonel, you have come to rescue us.'

Many years later those who took part in the events and were able to give an account of what they had seen declared that Sergei Muravyov-Apostol was moved to tears, 'thanked the peasants, told them that he would willingly

die to win the slightest easing of their situation... The emotions of these rough people coarsened by slavery consoled S. Muravyov. Later he was to say several times that it was on the New Year's day that he had experienced the happiest moments of his life, which only death could chase from his memory.'

However, he cannot inflame his neighbours.

One Decembrist officer accompanied by three soldiers succeeds in entering Kiev, calls at previously prepared addresses, distributes copies of the Catechism, and is quickly arrested.

Bestuzhev-Riumin cannot get through to neighbouring regiments and returns, having only just managed to avoid arrest.

The insurgents move towards Kiev, only 35 kilometres away, then they move in the opposite direction, and then towards Zhitomir. All around them the land is empty—neither a friend nor an enemy to be seen.

The enlightened landowner Rulikovsky (on whose estate, Motovilovka, the insurgent regiment stopped for one day), will later recall:

'Bestuzhev-Riumin talked for quite a long time with myself and my wife about the acquaintances that he had made among the most illustrious families in our three provinces. He was in a splendid mood and full of the brightest hopes for the success of the uprising.

'However, that night the frost ended and it thawed considerably, and puddles formed as a result of warm rain, and so my wife, looking out of the window at this change in the weather, said to Bestuzhev: "If it freezes again, you gentlemen will have a very slippery road."

'On hearing these words Bestuzhev paled, thought for a while and then said: 'Well, my lady, it can scarcely be more slippery than the road we are standing on now! But what can we do! There is no other way.'

That night and the following day a number of soldiers and some of the officers slip away. Ivan Sukhinov, the most determined, threatens and persuades—but he convinces far from all of them... They have lost, and death is probably close at hand. At any rate the best thing is not to hope for anything any more. However, on the brink of death 'the soul comprehends what lies concealed'. And if this is so, then, perhaps, it is precisely in these unhappy hours that fate, or God, in whom the Muravyov brothers believe, grants them the supreme, though brief happiness: after many years apart, the brothers are together and closer to each other than they have ever been. The arrival of Ippolit is fate! Everything that will happen tomorrow is fate. Life is not worth weeping over, but

it is 'a splendid thing' to find one's purpose in life, however tragic it might be. All three have discovered that purpose—which means that the evening of 2 January is a splendid evening. Brother Sergei is happy. For Matvei it is worse, harder. Unlike Sergei, he cannot give himself over entirely to the cause, to the uprising; he thinks and speaks of 'the sweetness of friendship', of a particular person and of his long love for her, which now, of course, will not have a happy end.

Matvei's notes describing these last hours have come down to us: 'How happy I would have been to die among my family and surrounded by friends. I did not fear death, for I always placed my hope in God. My soul will be with them for it loved them.'

Matvei feared only one thing, as, no doubt, did Ippolit: he feared that his brothers might die and he be left alone...

Matvei's thoughts about suicide were known to Sergei and to Bestuzhev-Riumin. The solemn vow not to commit suicide had been made two years previously, and only recently renewed. However, the young Ippolit, we know, spoke or thought of his death that evening. His conversation with his brother was clearly related to what he would do only a few hours later; without knowing precisely what victory or death meant such people at times feel something more; just as Romeo and Juliet knew something about love that they would have forgotten ten years later and would never have remembered, even in their happiest or most troubled moments. There is little use arguing or comparing the wisdom of 20 years and the wisdom of 40 years: they are different, and only a very few occasionally succeed in preserving the first as they acquire the second.

That night Ippolit probably had no doubt that he knew in advance the sentence of fate: there were only two possibilities, and at 19 years of age it is difficult to be convinced that there is, for example, a third possibility—exile to Siberia, from which one will return aged 50.

But there will never be a fiftieth birthday, nor even a twentieth for Ippolit.

On the fifth day of the uprising, on 3 January 1826, a large government detachment can be seen up ahead, composed of Hussars and cannon.

The Hussars have been told by their commanders that they are marching against hundreds of robbers, and they believe them.

The insurgents tell themselves that their fellow soldiers

will not shoot at them.

The soldiers on both sides are in the grip of a myth about the other side.

In front of the regiment are six of their own officers and two 'outsiders'—Bestuzhev-Riumin and Ippolit Muravyov. Matvei, wearing a dress-coat, is standing further back.

And then the canister hits them. Sergei tries to give commands, but a fresh burst of fire leaves him wounded in the head; several men fall down dead. Muravyov stands rooted to the spot; blood is running down his face; he summons all his strength to issue the necessary commands, but the soldiers, seeing that he is wounded, hesitate. Ippolit is wounded. The sight of the dead and wounded, and the absence of Sergei Muravyov, deliver a mortal blow to the courage of the insurgent soldiers. Throwing their weapons, they flee in all directions.

Matvei goes to look for the medical assistant to tend his brothers' wounds. Muravyov's dog, riddled with canister shot, is twisting and howling. At that moment Hussars appear from behind the cannon. Sukhinov and some of the other officers call on the soldiers to have courage, and deliberately place themselves directly in the line of fire.

One of Muravyov-Apostol's comrades-in-arms recalled that the leader of the uprising was at that moment almost unconscious, and to every question answered:

'Where is my brother?'

Bestuzhev-Riumin runs towards Muravyov, kissing and consoling him. With him a soldier from the first muskateer company also comes up to Muravyov. Despair is written on his face, and the sight of Muravyov sends him into a fury.

'You lied!' he finally shouts, and tries to run Muravyov through with his bayonet. Dumbfounded by this attempt on Muravyov's life, the friends chase the soldier away; at that moment, Ippolit Muravyov, wounded and streaming with blood, steps away from the fatal spot and, almost at the same moment as a Hussar jumps towards him, shoots himself through the head and falls dead at the feet of the horse. On the command of the general, the Hussars surround the officers and wounded soldiers and take away their weapons.

'Ippolit, thinking that his brother had been killed, shot himself,' writes Matvei, but how does he know what Ippolit's last thoughts were? Perhaps they came from the discussion about fate the previous day?

Those who had been under fire decided that the young Muravyov had shot himself in order to avoid capture: he had, after all, sworn...

It is unlikely that anyone will ever write a book about

the youngest brother: 19 years of life left few traces in documents or legend. A 3-year-old kid who is taken across Napoleon's Europe to his father, vague memories of his mother's funeral, his father, his beloved brothers and sisters, the cadet corps, liberal ideas, the first and last journey made on his own. Somewhere among all of this were verses, sorrows, joys, his first love affairs—we do not know... On 3 January 1826, he died.

The elder brothers said their final farewell to Ippolit. The dead, four soldiers and three officers, were buried.

Ivan Gorbachevsky, one of the chroniclers of the uprising, later writes:

'The Hussars who were in the convoy attempted to find out in secret from the captured officers what had been the cause of the uprising led by Sergei Muravyov, and when they learned about his aim and intentions, they immediately began to treat the prisoners more kindly and regretted that they had not known him earlier, saying that they had been assured that the Chernigovsky regiment had mutinied in order to be able to plunder with impunity... This unexpected campaign had been exceptionally exhausting for the Hussars, and they affirmed with simplicity of heart that, on the slightest opposition from Muravyov, at the first gunshot, they would turn back and would take no action against him.'

Transfer to the Caucasus and severe floggings await 877 soldiers of the Chernigovsky regiment. The wounded Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, his brother Matvei, and Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin are taken north, to the city from which they were expelled five years earlier after the Semyonovsky affair.

Only Sukhinov, the daredevil Sukhinov, has managed to escape. His description is sent out around the country and the pursuit begins, but he, well ahead of the gendarmes, reaches the border, and could easily cross over. He goes up to the frontier once, twice, three times ... and cannot bring himself to cross. He cannot imagine what he would do, how he could leave the world for which he has twice shed his blood, in 1812, and again now...

Sukhinov returns, he is captured and put in irons—a gendarme officer is insolent and jeers at him, but then Sukhinov stands up and tells him that, even if it should cost him his life, he will strangle the offender with his chains. The gendarme is so terrified that he begs Sukhinov not to kill him; from then on he treats him with every kindness, looking after the prisoner as if he were his closest relative.

The trial of the Decembrists dragged on indefinitely.

The authorities met the new year of 1826 in fine style.

The Moscow governor-general alone demanded 8,400 roubles for the delivery of the prisoners to St Petersburg (later a visiting foreigner will write that during the coronation of Nicholas in Moscow, 'peasants to the value of 8,000 roubles were crushed to death'. To this may be added that, with the accession of Nicholas, prisoners worth 8,400 roubles were delivered from Moscow). Considerable success had been scored in rounding up the offenders. Three hundred privates were in the Peter-and-Paul fortress, and a further 400 in the Keksholm fortress.

On 25 December, a warrant was signed for the arrest of 19 men; on 26 December—for a further 9, on 27—for 16, on 28—another 9, and on 30 December—for 11 more. Altogether, several thousand people were arrested.

'Great God!' one of the prisoners exclaimed. 'Will the day ever dawn when they will understand that men were not created to be the playthings of a few elite families? When the light of publicity dawns in our country, how people will shudder at the injustice concealed by these walls!'

The great number of victims resulted in a shortage of cells. Buildings intended as barracks were converted into a prison. The whitewashed glass in the windows let not a single ray of enlivening light into these dungeons. Cages of logs were constructed in the long barrack rooms in such a way as to make communication between them impossible. The cells were no more than three or four strides across. A cast-iron pipe ran through some of the cells, and these pipes were so low that they constantly emitted a suffocating heat that was genuine torture for the prisoner.

The food was dreadful, as the money allocated for prison food was being embezzled by officials. Some of the prisoners were living on bread and water. Many had irons on their hands and feet. The Emperor himself decided upon the food rations, according to the reports he received from the Investigation Committee, and ordered that prison conditions be made more severe. Psychological torture was also employed: 'Sometimes the prisoners received heart-rending letters from their unfortunate relatives who, deceived by appearances, lauded to the skies the clemency of the one who had never shown any. A priest was instructed to bring the prisoners religious consolation, but the main purpose of his visits was to obtain confessions. When he came to know us all better, he admitted that he had been

deceived regarding us. Many of the prisoners fell ill, many went mad, some attempted suicide.

The authorities were triumphant. It seemed they had everything—the conspirators, and their plans, and their ideas; it seemed that the ten-year existence of secret societies was summed up here, in these days of investigation, in these papers.

Generals and investigators are practical people, and it is hard for them to understand that the captured Ryleyev, the chained Nikita Muravyov, Kakhovsky, Pestel are but a part of the real Ryleyev, Muravyov, Kakhovsky and Pestel; that the situation they and their friends created and the principles they proclaimed are irreversible and indestructible, like a ray of light which traverses the universe, even if its source is destroyed.

Many years later Lunin will write:

‘You can get rid of people, but not their ideas.’

An idea so obvious to some, so laughable to others.

But where is Lunin himself?

Lunin is still in Warsaw with his regiment—but the investigators are already very interested in him...

It takes a long time to transfer the wounded Sergei Muravyov-Apostol and his companions to the capital.

Adjutant-General Tolle, chief of staff of the 1st Army, reports from Mogilev to St Petersburg:

‘In my conversation with Lieutenant-Colonel Sergei Muravyov I noticed great obduracy in his evil, for I asked him: how could you undertake an insurrection with a handful of people? You, who as a young man serving in the army acquired none of that military glory which might have signified everything in the eyes of your subordinates: how could you decide upon such an enterprise? You hoped for the support of other regiments, probably because you had fellow conspirators among them: did you not place your hopes on some famous man with a greater reputation and higher rank than yourself, who, amidst general confusion, was to take over the leadership? To all these questions he answered that he was prepared to reply truthfully to any questions regarding himself, but as regards others, he would never reveal anything, and he asserted that the whole business of the insurrection by the Chernigovsky regiment was his work alone and carried through without any prior preparation. In my opinion great patience will have to be exercised in questioning him.’

In between the clichéd phrases one can hear echoes of a live conversation—the astonishment of the respectable general that someone would rise in rebellion ‘without any

military glory ... or prestige in the eyes of subordinates'. Bestuzhev-Riumin, who had taken part in only one battle in all his life, was probably addressed even less respectfully. About him in the same report: 'Like Muravyov, a shrewd man sunk in his evil, for it was through him that the conspirators communicated; their affairs kept him constantly on the move; he must have been aware of all the plots and intrigues of this subversive society.'

The interview was harsh in manner and tone. If the word 'villain' appears several times in Tolle's written report, we can be sure that the chief of staff did not restrain himself when speaking, any more than did the aged commander-in-chief of the 1st Army, General Osten-Sacken, who 'fell ill from distress'.

'Mogilev. The name of this town should remind any Russian of his martyr, Muravyov-Apostol: when he was brought in chains before Osten-Sacken, and when Sacken began to rage at him, using the language of patriotism, Muravyov shook his irons with restrained anger, spat at Sacken and turned to face the door' (from the account of an old captain escorting Muravyov to St Petersburg).

These lines were published 35 years later in the newspaper *Kolokol* (The Bell) published by the great emigre writer Herzen; they were sent in by one of his secret Polish correspondents.

Was it really so, or is this just part of a legend?

It may have been so. Other prisoners testified that the commanders of the 1st Army 'did not, in fact, interrogate, but cursed'. In this case, Sacken himself had every reason to wish to conceal the fact of being spat at, to conceal dishonour to his name, and never to refer to it anywhere. However, it is possible that the 'account of an old captain' is the exaggerated version of a real, sharp and angry interview.

Finally, however, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol was delivered to St Petersburg, to the Tsar, about which event Nicholas I himself has left us a curious note:

'Gifted, of unusual intellect, having received an excellent education, though in the foreign manner, he was bold and self-assured in his thinking, to the point of insanity, but at the same time secretive and exceptionally firm. Seriously wounded in the head, captured armed, he was brought here in chains. Here the irons were removed and he was brought in to me. Weakened by his serious wound, he was scarcely able to walk. Having known him to be an able officer when in the Semyonovsky regiment, I told him that it was all the more difficult for me to see an old companion in such a tragic situation as formerly I had known him as an

officer who had caught the attention of the late emperor that now he must realise how criminal his actions had been, that he was the cause of the misfortunes of many innocent victims, and I urged him to hide nothing and not to aggravate his guilt by obstinacy. He could barely stand; we sat him down and began to question him. With perfect frankness he told us the whole plan of action and his connections. When he had said all he had to say, I replied:

"Tell me, Muravyov, how is it that you, an intelligent and educated man, could even for a moment so forget yourself as to consider your enterprise possible, and not what it actually was—a criminal, wicked act of madness?"

'He lowered his head and said nothing...

'When the interrogation was over, Levashov and I had to lift him up and lead him out supporting him!'

Legend: 'When questioned by the emperor Nicholas, Sergei Muravyov described the misery of Russia so sharply that Nicholas gave him his hand and offered him clemency if he would promise to undertake no more action against him. Sergei Muravyov refused any offer of clemency, saying that he had rebelled against just such arbitrary despotism, and therefore would accept no arbitrary mercy.'

There was, of course, no such scene. However, we can surmise what the Tsar promised him on the night of 20 January. In actual fact the Tsar did give permission to speak of himself, referred to some future 'joint service', and all of this, multiplied several times over by rumour and imagination, gives us the final legend: 'Nicholas gave him his hand and offered him clemency.'

The Tsar and the Lieutenant-Colonel part almost content with each other. In the following weeks and months no one will shout at Sergei Muravyov, nor put him in chains, he will make statements.

However, his painful, tragic retreat will nonetheless take place 'in good order'; he will remain calm, stoic, philosophical, Roman in mood; nine-tenths of his testimony will be nothing more than a confirmation of what the others have said, and however paradoxical and tragic it may seem, his last months are in part eased by the fact that the authorities had already learned a great deal before he confronted the investigators: between 14 December and 20 January the list of the arrested was virtually complete.

Sergei Ivanovich regrets, but does not repent, and apparently he inspires a certain respect even in his interrogators: all is clear enough, captured armed, was able to rise in revolt—is able to hold his own under questioning.

In the 'Points of Inquiry' and other documents of the Investigation Committee there are occasionally to be found

certain unusual turns of phrase:

'1826, 3rd February, the Investigation Committee set up on Imperial Order requires of Lieutenant-Colonel Sergei Muravyov-Apostol the following testimony:

'In addition to the statement made yesterday, explain, with your customary candour, ..., etc.

5 April. 'Lieutenant-Colonel Sergei Muravyov-Apostol of the Chernigovsky infantry regiment was questioned... He elucidated certain circumstances, but in general he revealed more frankness in his own statements than in confirmation of the statements of others, and was clearly willing to take responsibility for everything the others accused him of, not wishing to justify himself by contesting their statements. At the end he declared that he regrets only having involved others, particularly the lower ranks, in the fiasco, but continues to consider his intentions noble and honourable, about which God alone can judge, and this is his only consolation in his present position. It was suggested that points of inquiry be put before him.'

Undoubtedly the Committee is annoyed that 'God alone can judge'. Sergei Ivanovich clearly and precisely connects together two ideas: execution and intention.

The intention is noble, but the execution less than successful: he involved ordinary soldiers, sometimes resorting to pure invention (about the 'Tsar Constantine', or that other regiments would 'surely come to their aid'); the brothers are lost, and he himself did not do all he could have done ('And only when I die 'twill dawn upon the world whom it has lost'). However, there are no excuses; no regrets over what has been done manage to enter into that impregnable corner of his soul where resides his idea.

Nor, in fact, are the investigator-judges altogether opposed to this. They condemn the majority of the Decembrists precisely for intent (for example, intent to commit regicide). Pestel was arrested before he had done anything at all, and his guilt, seen as greater than that of the others, lies in his intent; but the Committee does not scruple to condemn from either point of view, either for deed or for intent.

Moreover, Sergei Ivanovich has already pronounced his own sentence, and all the rest is not, in fact, of any particular interest or importance to him. He has a high level of self-awareness: even if you are correct in your evaluations, I have my own.

It is one thing to question Muravyov-Apostol, and quite another to question Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin, a youthful, fiery temperament given to sudden transitions from enthusiasm to despair.

Bestuzhev-Riumin to the Tsar, 26 January:

'Sire,

'I have observed a great deal, and would like to present to You my observations. The only favour I would like to request of You is that You do not attempt to compel me to name others, and in return I intended to beg Your Majesty to hold me responsible for all the conspiracies of the Society of which I was a member. I always believed, and still continue to believe, that leaders capable of carrying through a revolution are of far greater importance than those who first conceived the idea of revolution... On the evening of the day before yesterday, when attempts were made to force me to give names and I was overwhelmed by Your Majesty's severity, I was as if stupefied. However, it was not fear of death that thus affected me. Many can tell you that it is only love for my parents which has kept me bound to this life, which has long lost any attraction for me. However, Sire, the severity shown to me, fear of exposing others to similar treatment, the certainty that this would reduce many families to despair—all these considerations led me into a state of melancholy from which at present I am with difficulty seeking to free myself, although, the more I ponder on it, the more I am convinced that senseless severity fills you with revulsion.

'Sire, I beg you to grant me another audience, but I ask You as a favour not to attempt to frighten me. Thinking about people, Your Majesty should know that it is possible not to fear death, yet nonetheless to be lost in a mere conversation—and not only when the conversation is with one's monarch. Perhaps, in the future, you will be convinced that lack of feeling is not characteristic of me, and that, while asking nothing for myself, I may be of service to my country, for which you can be a beneficent ruler while retaining all Your power.'

'The day before yesterday', therefore, the Tsar was shouting and 'frightening' Bestuzhev-Riumin. However he is not granted another audience.

Two days later he appeals to one of the main investigators, General Chernyshev:

'General, have the goodness to ask the Committee to permit me to answer in French, for, to my shame, I must confess that I am more accustomed to that language than to Russian.'

Answer: 'Request refused, with a firm reaffirmation through the Commandant that the answers be only in Russian.'

The reason is not only that the use of French would

have further complicated the taking of minutes (the clerks would have made innumerable mistakes if they had had to decipher statements made in French): Nicholas I is deliberately emphasising the national character of the monarchy—those rebel-liberators don't even know Russian!

Bestuzhev's fellow-prisoners in neighbouring cells recalled that at night they could hear coming from his cell the constant rustle of pages being turned: Bestuzhev was using a dictionary in an attempt to make an accurate translation from French into Russian. The Decembrist Alexander Odoyevsky could not make use of the tapping code devised by his companions because he did not know the order of letters in the Russian alphabet by heart.

However, Odoyevsky wrote marvellous verse in Russian, and the lively mind and talent of Bestuzhev-Riumin come through even the official statements.

Bestuzhev had a harsh time during the investigation, harsher than the rest; if someone were to invent a 'unit of prison suffering'—the number of questionings, confrontations, etc., divided by the age of the prisoner—then Bestuzhev would probably be shown to have suffered more than any of the others.

Exultation—this was his gift of speech with which he hypnotised the members of the Society of United Slavs and was the music of the secret society. In periods of melancholy, however, this youngness of spirit becomes a strange, talented, frightening sincerity.

'Accused by many, and not in a position to supply incontrovertible evidence of the falsity of their affirmations, I preferred to agree with them rather than give the Committee the slightest reason to doubt my sincerity. I do not wish it to be said that I refuse to confess only because torture is not used. However, I will put before you certain ideas, such that Your Excellency, burdened with important affairs, will feel assured that this information is without foundation...

'Your Excellency, pray forgive me for not setting everything down as well as it should be. So many misfortunes could break spirits stronger than mine.'

The investigators, however, do not believe him.

On 11 February the Investigation Committee rules:

'Bestuzhev-Riumin is informed that, by Imperial Injunction, as a result of the evasions and deviations from the truth noticed in his answers, it has been decreed that he be put in irons and the points of inquiry be put before him once again.'

Interrogations, confrontations: Pestel, Ryleyev, Nikita Muravyov are summoned time and again; hoods, usually

tattered, incidentally, are put over their heads so that they should not remember the way out of the cells, then they are taken into a room with an enormous table covered in red cloth. Three candles, lamps hanging on the walls, ten investigating generals...

When the Committee learned about Pestel's *Russian Law* from one of the young officers, Pestel was sent in chains and under special guard to the Ukraine. On a dark winter night the guards dug a hole in the frozen ground and searched for the hiding place. It took a long time, and they began to suspect a trick, but then the shovel suddenly struck the oil-cloth covering. Soon a huge pile of paper was delivered to Nicholas I, but he merely glanced through them and ordered them to be taken away to the secret archives; it was another 80 years before Pestel's fascinating ideas, aspirations and plans to liberate and totally reform Russia were finally published.

The Tsar was not interested in such documents: together with the investigators he was seeking impressive evidence of 'direct crimes', primarily plans to assassinate the Tsar.

They were also looking for criminals who had still not been seized, Mikhail Lunin in particular.

Lunin's protector, the Grand Prince Constantine, sent him hunting on the border between Poland and Prussia in the hope that he would flee across the frontier; however, Lunin, whom nothing and no one could ever frighten, returned.

'Well, Mikhail Sergeyevich, you have only yourself to blame,' said the Grand Prince. An urgent demand for Lunin had come from St Petersburg.

In April 1826, Lunin is already lodged in the Peter-and-Paul fortress.

He is questioned by General Chernyshev.

The two men are virtually the same age—Chernyshev is a mere two years older. Both are powerfully-built, strong and audacious; old acquaintances and former brother-officers in the Horse Guards.

The lieutenant-colonel is 'a friend of Mars, Bacchus and Venus'.

The general is also a daring soldier, a lady's man and a carouser.

The prisoner is firm, ironic.

The goaler is cynical, clever, and also inclined to humour.

For one of them, three more months will bring penal servitude followed, ten years later, by exile. Fifteen years from now he will face a second period of penal servitude, and twenty years from now he will meet a tragic death.

As for the other, four months will bring the title of count, followed a year later by that of minister of war. In fifteen years he will become a prince, in twenty two years he will be made chairman of the State Council, and in twenty three years he will receive the title of illustrious prince. Thirty years from now his army will be defeated in the Crimean war, and this will be followed, a year later, by his resignation and death.

No doubt Chernyshev was pleased to see and question Lunin, for it had taken considerable effort to make this interrogation possible.

Chernyshev questions, Lunin answers, the secretary takes down the minutes.

Question: When, where and by whom was this society originally set up, and under what name?

Answer: The secret society, subsequently known as the Union of Welfare, was founded in Moscow... I cannot name the founders as that would go against my conscience and my rules.

'That would go against my conscience and my rules.' Though not recorded on paper, the concealed, ironic counter-question addressed to the Committee is clearly discernible: 'And do your conscience and rules permit friends to be betrayed?'

Further on in the minutes we read:

'I cannot say who were the founders of the society as a result of the above-mentioned rule which I follow...'

'As for the leaders of the branches of the society, I cannot name them because of the same rule...'

'I cannot recall who attended it...'

Lunin was also questioned about those responsible for his education.

Answer: 'I was educated at home; I had many teachers and tutors, both Russian and foreign /several foreign surnames follow/,—and many others whom I cannot now recall.'

Lunin 'cannot now recall' the names of the Russian teachers, who could be compromised by any reference to them.

None of Chernyshev's questions succeed in dislodging Lunin from the position he has adopted: he was a member of the society up to 1822; later, when preparations for an uprising began, he did not take part. He counts to his credit the fact that he attempted to prepare Russia to adopt a constitution.

At that point, Chernyshev, having realised that he cannot force Lunin to change his position, turns the conversation to regicide. He has precise information about

a plan to abduct the Tsar which Lunin had drawn up ten years earlier.

It is a difficult moment. For the first time Lunin clearly sees that his opponents can bring serious accusations: to plan regicide is, according to all Russian laws and codes, a heinous offence. A resolute denial of these plans will now make no difference: two (indeed there are already three!) statements are sufficient for the fatal fact to be taken as proved, and it is folly to persist; every exposure contains an element of humiliation, whereas Lunin consistently maintains his own integrity.

He decides to confess, but, as it were, *en passant*, reducing the significance of the ill-fated conversation to the minimum.

'I never had the intention or aim of making an attempt upon the life of the late emperor, of blessed memory, but in conversations, when one proposal was rejected in favour of another, it may be that I mentioned yet another way of achieving this end.'

The important words in this answer are the carelessly introduced 'it may be that I mentioned', that is, Lunin is emphasising that the point under question is so insignificant that it is difficult even to remember: what may not slip out in the heat of discussion? Can one be judged for a vague intention or a chance word? Indeed, not even for a vague intention, but for pointing to some abstract possibility—that one might, for example, make an attempt on the life of the Tsar.

The interrogation is over.

The two men were speaking totally different languages: Chernyshev is using official language, Lunin is speaking freely. Lunin bases himself on such axioms as the right to independent judgement, the right to act as one's conscience dictates, the right to wage a struggle for the principle of freedom under the law—in secret if it cannot be waged openly. Therefore he admits almost everything of which Chernyshev accuses him, but his words and the tone of his speech reveal that this is something to be proud of and that Chernyshev himself cannot, in effect, deny it.

Whatever the case may be, after the first interrogation in St Petersburg, the Committee could consider the accusation of planning regicide as proven and confirmed by the admission of the defendant himself.

Lunin is sent back to his cell, where he spends two days deep in thought and then, on 18 April, sends a remarkable message to the Committee.

'To the questions concerning the founders of the secret society and persons belonging to it, I could not in all

conscience give a satisfactory answer, since if I had given their names I would have betrayed kinship and friendship. However, in the course of my first interrogation on the 16th day of this month, I received convincing and indisputable evidence of the fact that both the names of all those who belonged to the society, and their activities, are perfectly well known to the Imperial Committee, and therefore, in obedience to the will of this Imperial Committee, I now add that the membership of the Secret Society included...'

A few names follow—those of Pestel, the Muravyov-Apostol brothers, Nikita Muravyov, Yakushkin.

This mocking letter is not even recorded in the papers of the Investigation Committee, although no formal complaint can be made against it. He has confessed as required. Lunin asks the Committee to pardon him for having kept silent thus far, for it is only now that he has learned 'convincingly and indisputably' that the names of the members of the society are known to the authorities. The other members 'with whom I was but little or not at all acquainted', Lunin does not name, and, into the bargain, persists in reminding the Committee of the decency of his rules of conduct, so that the Committee, if it wishes to be just and gracious (and how could it not wish to be so?) should not be angered by this natural refusal to betray friends and brothers; to behave otherwise would, after all, violate moral principle—and can the violation of moral principle be of benefit to the state?

In June 1826, the Tsar appointed the Supreme Criminal Court, which was to pronounce sentence in the absence of the defendants. It consisted of 72 members: 18 members of the State Council, 36 senators, three representatives of the Church and 15 military and civil officials with special powers.

Their average age was around 55 years, double that of the Decembrists (27.4 years; none of the leaders of the movement, Pestel excepted, had reached thirty; the thirty-eight year old Lunin was the 'old man' amongst them). Thus one generation was passing judgement on another. There were 122 defendants.

The first to be discussed was Pestel.

The chairman of the court, Prince Pyotr Lopukhin, an old man, deaf, who had already served five emperors, writes on his ballot paper 'Death by quartering'.

Ten members of the State Council—Prince Kurakin, Count Pyotr Tolstoy, General Sukin (the commandant of the Peter-and-Paul fortress), Balashov (the one who went to Bonaparte from Vilno in the summer of 1812 and appeared

in Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace*), Vasilchikov, Nesselrode, Saltykov, Liven, Bolotnikov, Speransky—all write the same humane sentence on their ballot papers. However, this is a strategic move: almost all of them know that the Tsar will not confirm the sentence, but will commute quartering to a lighter sentence. Thus they hand down the severest sentence in order to give the Tsar the opportunity to display his clemency.

The other members of the State Council supported the sentence, though they resorted to less precise formulae: Count Morkov demands 'a shameful and severe penalty', Lanskoï—'shameful death penalty', Minister of Justice Lobanov-Rostovsky—'shameful death penalty', Kartsev displayed liberalism—'the death penalty'. Finally the illustrious admiral and writer Shishkov expressed himself very vaguely indeed: 'Belongs to the first category of criminals' (one may understand this as one wishes, but at least there is no direct demand for death by quartering).

The three members of the Holy Synod (Metropolitans Seraphim and Yevgeni, and Archbishop Avraam) wrote that they 'agreed with the majority decision', but never again wrote thus, for it put them in agreement with quartering, a totally unsuitable sentence for representatives of the Church to support.

Thirteen specially appointed officials present there unanimously and unhesitatingly call for death by quartering.

The thirty-five senators revealed the same unanimity. Among those voting were some on whom the conspirators had counted, should they be victorious.

The Tsar displayed a certain graciousness in not compelling Senator Ivan Muravyov-Apostol to attend the court passing sentence on his three sons who had raised the Chernigovsky regiment in revolt...

Particular caution, however, was exercised with regard to one man on whom, it would seem, the Decembrists had relied more than on any other high-ranking individual, the 72-year-old admiral Nikolai Mordvinov.

Mordvinov did not attend the first session of the court, and his name is absent from the list of voters. However, this was no trickery: the admiral nonetheless expressed his particular opinion concerning those who ran the risk of facing the death sentence.

'According to long established Russian laws, they deserve the death penalty. However, in conformity with the edicts of the Empress Elizabeth, 1753, April 29, and 1754, September 30th, and also with the instruction of Empress Catherine the Great and the edict of Emperor Paul, 1799, April 20th, I propose that they be stripped

of rank and nobility and, having placed their head on the block, be sent into penal servitude. N. Mordvinov.'

This brief proposal contains several ideas: firstly, the country has no fixed laws (the old laws say one thing, but 'the more recent edicts' say another); secondly, preference is clearly given to later laws, which express the spirit of more modern times; in other words, Mordvinov is saying that to execute is to go back from the 19th to the 17th century. He could, of course, request no more than that the death sentence be commuted to penal servitude, and this is precisely what he did.

Mordvinov did not sympathise with insurrection, rebellion, revolution, but his broad mind understood that these young people had been fighting, in their own way, for that progressive reform of Russia for which he, too, was campaigning in another way.

And here we see the sad picture of Russian reality: the highest valour deserving of admiration is to request that the death penalty be commuted to penal servitude.

The bold opinion expressed by Mordvinov, under suspicion by the authorities, is, if one may so put it, a gesture worthy of Lunin.

Thirty years later Herzen will write of the old admiral:

'We are so accustomed to see the destiny of Russia in the hands of incapable old men who have received their posts as a kind of reward from a life insurance company for the unfailing health of their digestive system, that a man such as Mordvinov appears to be some eccentric foreigner, a stranger among his own people.'

However, let us return to the court. That same morning of 30 June, the members voted without further ado in favour of death by quartering for Ryleyev, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Bestuzhev-Riumin and Kakhovsky.

No one, of course, noticed, or wished to notice, that, whereas Ryleyev and Muravyov-Apostol had indeed taken up arms, and Kakhovsky had killed two men, Pestel, however criminal he might appear in the eyes of authority, is accused only of intent, design: he had not fired a single shot, and had been arrested two weeks before the insurrection in the south.

After the five main offenders, another thirty-one are simply 'to be executed'; these include Matvei Muravyov-Apostol and Nikita Muravyov.

Sentence was also rapidly passed on Lunin; some of the senators and the members of the State Council were in favour of the death penalty, but the majority voted for 'political death and penal servitude in perpetuity'.

Ryleyev... He did not believe that he would be sentenced

to death: he was a poet, husband and father. Later the Tsar would declare that, had he known he was a poet, he would not have him executed, thus shifting the blame, as it were, onto those who failed to report this fact to him, onto his entourage.

Inside the fortress walls there was a little garden where the prisoners were taken out in turns for exercise. One of them was able to come out before Ryleyev had been taken back inside: 'We saw each other, and this was enough for us to push aside the lance-corporal, rush up to each other and embrace after such a long separation. Such an incident was momentous in the fortress, where secrecy and silence, eavesdropping and watching never cease for an instant for the unfortunate victims buried there alive...

'What more can I say? I never saw him again.'

And here is the account given by another of Ryleyev's companions from the Northern society:

'Once my dinner was brought in to me, and as the food was abominable and I could summon no appetite to eat it, I began, while waiting for hunger to make its appearance, to examine the tin plates, and on the back of one of them I found the last verses composed by Ryleyev carefully scratched with a nail:

*Prison my honour cannot take,
A noble cause has brought me here,
And in my chains no shame I fear,
I wear them for my country's sake.*

An account of the last meeting between the Muravyov-Apostol brothers and their father has also survived:

'He awaited with dread their arrival in the visitor's room; Matvei Ivanovich, the first to appear, was shaved and respectably dressed and, with tears in his eyes, ran to embrace him; as he was not numbered among the first category of criminals and hoped for the clemency of the Tsar, he tried to console his father with the hope of a reunion in the near future. However, when the father's favourite arrived, the unhappy Sergei Ivanovich, unshaven and wearing a shabby, tattered coat, the old man was visibly upset and, trembling all over, he went up to him, embraced him and exclaimed in despairing tones: "What a dreadful situation I find you in! Why didn't you write to me, like your brother, to send you all you need?"

"The son, with the firmness of spirit typical of him, pointed to his worn coat and answered: "Mon pere, cela me suffira!", that is, "This will suffice me for what is left of my life!" We do not know how this sad and painful scene ended as the father, already advanced in age, said

his final farewell to his sons whom he loved so much and in whose qualities he justly took pride!

We do not possess all the documents written during those hours, and perhaps much was simply passed on by word of mouth, but it would appear that Sergei Muravyov made two requests of the authorities:

To let him spend the last night before execution together with Bestuzhev-Riumin.

To let him write a letter to his brother.

Both requests were granted. The two condemned men were lodged next to each other: in cell number 12 (Muravyov) and cell number 16 (Bestuzhev). They were separated by a screen through which it was easy to converse. The letter to Matvei must have been delivered by the priest, Father Myslovsky.

Many lawyers who oppose the death penalty assert that the last hours and minutes are, for the condemned man, an additional penalty not provided for in the sentence, a deliberately provoked serious psychological trauma. Happy is the man who has some concern or affair to occupy the time. Sergei Muravyov was occupied up to the last moment.

The Decembrist Rosen: 'Mikhail Pavlovich Bestuzhev-Riumin was only 23-years-old. He was unable to renounce voluntarily a life he had scarcely begun. He struggled like a bird in a cage... He needed to be comforted and cheered. The warder Sokolov and the guards Shibayev and Trofimov did not stop them from talking loudly to each other, respecting the last minutes of the condemned victims. I regret that they were unable to convey to me the substance of their last conversation, but only told me that they talked about our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the immortality of the soul. M. A. Nazimov, who was in cell 13, was only occasionally able to hear how, during that last night, S. I. Muravyov-Apostol, in the course of his conversation with Bestuzhev-Riumin, read out loud some passages from the prophets and the New Testament.'

Shall we really never know the contents of this last conversation?

Lunin (14 years later, in Siberia):

'In the Peter-and-Paul fortress I was locked in room No. 7 in the Kronwerk Curtain, at the entrance to a vaulted corridor. Wooden dungeons had been built along both sides of this corridor which, in size and construction, resembled cages; here political defendants were kept. Taking advantage of the negligence or sympathy of the goalers, they talked amongst themselves, and their conversation, echoing back off the vaulting and the wooden partitions, came to me confused but intelligible. When the noise of

the chains and locks died down, I could hear quite plainly what was said at the other end of the corridor. One night I could not sleep because of the stifling air in the casemate, the insects and the stifling smoke from the night-light, and suddenly my ear was caught by the sound of a voice speaking the following verse:

*In pensive mood alone I'll walk the earth,
To no man known,
And only when I die
'Twill dawn upon the world
Whom it has lost.'*¹

"Who composed those lines?" asked another voice.

"Sergei Muravyov-Apostol."

'It was not my destiny to see again upon this earth this well-known fellow conspirator, condemned to die on the gallows for his political convictions. This strange and last communication between our minds serves as a sign that he remembered me and as a presage of our early reunion in a world where knowledge of the truth no longer requires either sacrifice or effort.'

Scarcely anyone could have better described the horror of nights spent in the Peter-and-Paul fortress.

Lunin does not say that the verse was spoken by his second cousin: more likely it was one of the members of the Southern society who knew the verse.

'And only when I die...'—a reference to a world that would continue without them: and from that summer evening of 13 July, the first evening they were not to see, that world would begin to ponder on whom it had lost. And even if it did not begin to think about it, did not wish to think about it, it would nonetheless experience the influence of what had only just taken place.

All that was to happen later—on 14 July 1826, twenty years later, a hundred, a thousand—will be bound up in some way with what is happening on 13 July, and we can rejoice that it is so; and if it is difficult to rejoice, then it is worth pondering on that also. Meanwhile Sergei Muravyov persuades, talks, fights back the grief and regret that he involved in such a dreadful affair such a lively, excitable, at times inspired, but now dispirited young man.

The Decembrist Tsebrikov: 'Bestuzhev-Riumin could, of course, be forgiven for grieving over his departing life. Bestuzhev-Riumin had been condemned to death. He even broke down while talking with Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, who with the stoicism of an ancient Roman,

¹ Tr. by Irina Zheleznova.

was persuading him not to give way to despair, but to meet death with resolute will, not to lower himself in the eyes of the crowd that would surround him, to meet death like a martyr dying for the noble cause of Russia, bowed down under despotism, and in his last moments to bear in mind the just verdict of future generations!

'The constant noise of footsteps in the corridor prevented me from hearing clearly everything said by Sergei Muravyov-Apostol; however, his firm voice, and in general his edifying conversation with Bestuzhev-Riumin, which contained only exhortations and no words of consolation save for the just but distant verdict of future generations, was an amazing novelty for all those listening, and in particular for me, and I was ready, as I recall, to throw myself on Muravyov's neck and beg him to continue a speech the words of which I can sometimes still hear!'

Little time is left: at midnight the priest arrives, in two or three hours it will be time to leave, and perhaps Sergei, even as he exhorts Bestuzhev, is also writing a letter to his brother, a letter which will naturally echo this conversation with a friend like another brother, contain similar arguments, perhaps even similar turns of phrase. Because his brother Matvei may pass sentence on himself, and in this case is in a position similar to the five condemned men.

We do not know what has happened to the original of this letter. It was published in the journal *Russian Archives* in 1887, immediately after the death of Matvei Ivanovich, who had naturally kept these pages and who, by his long life, had, as it were, fulfilled the last request of his brother—not to leave his post, to understand that the life and death of one man do not concern him alone. Through the religious tenor of the message a reproach can be heard: I would be grateful for one more day, month, year, but you, who remain behind, have, perhaps, decades ahead of you, how can you think of suicide!

Behind the walls are those who will suffer, but will live: some are old friends, others are but brief and recent acquaintances. Andreyev, a member of the Northern society who is in a cell next to Muravyov, will say to him that night:

'Sing me a song, I have heard that you have a fine voice.'

Muravyov sang him a song.

'What is your sentence?' asked Andreyev.

'Hanging!' answered Muravyov calmly.

'Forgive me for disturbing you.'

'Not at all. I am very happy that I was able to give you the pleasure.'

The chains had been put on that evening, because the condemned are capable of anything.

When Sergei Ivanovich saw Sergeant-Major Podushkin coming into the cell with a sad expression on his face, he spared him unnecessary explanations: 'You have, of course, come to put the chains on.' Podushkin called in some men, and they fastened irons on the legs of the five condemned prisoners. All the condemned watched these preparations for execution perfectly calmly 'except Mikhail Bestuzhev: he was still young, and he did not want to die.'

Four of the condemned, including Muravyov-Apostol, had not worn irons for six months. However, Bestuzhev-Riumin, who had angered the investigators with his 'confused answers', had been put in irons in February, was unfastened only for the reading of the sentence, and then, this time up to the end, found himself wearing the heaviest irons the fortress possessed.

Now they are being led out.

Pestel, Bestuzhev-Riumin, Muravyov-Apostol, Ryleyev and Kakhovsky are wearing the same uniforms and frock-coats as when they were arrested. At the gates the condemned men, their legs burdened with heavy chains, have difficulty in stepping across the high threshold. Pestel is so exhausted he has to be helped.

Before leaving the casemate, Bestuzhev-Riumin takes from around his neck a holy picture embroidered by his cousin and framed in bronze, and with it he blesses the guard Trofimov. Ten months earlier, the members of the Society of United Slavs had taken their oath on this very picture. Later, one of the Decembrists will propose an exchange with the guard, but the old soldier will refuse all offers, stating that he wishes to give the picture to Bestuzhev's sister. Only Lunin will subsequently succeed in persuading the guard, and he will keep the picture with him even in Siberia.

On the way the condemned men talk to each other, and we, like the priest, can hear Sergei Muravyov-Apostol who keeps comforting his young friend...

Asked by the artist Ilya Yefimovich Repin to suggest a subject for a painting, Lev Tolstoy suggested 'the moment when the Decembrists were led to the gallows. The young Bestuzhev-Riumin was attracted to Muravyov-Apostol by his character rather than by his ideas, and had always acted in concert with him; and it was only at the moment of execution that he weakened and broke down, but Muravyov embraced him, and they went together to the gallows.'

Tolstoy had gathered his impression of events from certain reminiscences by the Decembrists. We now know that

the young Bestuzhev was not only 'attracted by an idea', but on more than one occasion it was he who inspired Muravyov. However, though there was much Tolstoy did not know, he managed, as usual, to put his finger on the most important; from an appraisal of their common ideas, he moves on to personalities: 'weakened', 'embraced'—for Tolstoy this is of vital importance in evaluating events, possibly more important than the idea itself. The main question is—up to what point can a man remain a man?

When they come in sight of the gallows, Pestel, with great presence of mind, says: 'Have we not deserved a better death? As I recall, we never turned our face away from bullets or cannon-fire. Could we not have been executed by a firing squad?'

The noose was 'a death of shame'.

When they have all arrived, the order is given to remove their outer clothing, which is immediately thrown onto a fire, and they are given long white shirts to which, when the prisoners put them on, are tied rectangular black leather chest-bands on which 'criminal Sergei Muravyov', 'criminal Kondrat Ryleyev' is written in white paint...

Dostoyevsky found himself in this same position, and later said (in the person of Prince Myshkin) what the five Decembrists were unable to say:

'The preparations are painful. When they pronounce sentence, put on the shirts, tie your hands and lead you up to the scaffold—at that moment you feel the full horror of your situation... What goes on in the soul at that moment, what convulsions seize hold of it?'

Meanwhile, Father Myslovsky is waiting to see a messenger arrive with news of clemency, but to his total astonishment he waits in vain.

The agony of delay is in its third hour. A slow fire is something all have heard of, but a slow noose... For about two hours the condemned men were kept waiting beside their own graves or at their own funeral service.

'When they were brought to the gallows,' one memoirist recalls, 'Sergei Muravyov asked for permission to pray; he knelt down and said loudly: "God, save Russia and the Tsar!" For many such a prayer was incomprehensible, but Sergei Muravyov was a Christian of deep faith, and he prayed for the Tsar as Jesus prayed on the cross for his enemies. Then the priest went up to each of them with a cross.'

Pestel says to the priest: 'Although I am not Orthodox, still I ask you to bless me for this long journey.' Then, saying farewell for the last time, they all shake hands. They are dressed in white shirts, hoods are put over

their heads and their hands are bound. Sergei Muravyov and Pestel still find a way to shake hands once more. Finally they are taken up onto the scaffold and a noose is put round each of their necks...

This last prayer, supposedly said by Sergei Muravyov, attracted particular attention among both friends and enemies. Who prayed? Who did he pray for? Some of the witnesses assert that it was Ryleyev who prayed... Sergei Muravyov or Ryleyev? The witnesses mention no others. Only Nicholas I will write: 'Almost none of them (those condemned to penal servitude) repented: the five condemned men, in contrast, displayed a deep sense of sorrow, especially Kakhovsky who, going to his death, said that he prayed for me. There is only him for whom I feel any regret. May God forgive him and grant him rest.'

The Tsar based himself on the words of Chernyshev who, as a top-ranking official, did not stand by the gallows but rode a little way off on his horse. Someone told him of the prayer for the Tsar. Chernyshev realises that the Emperor must be informed, the news will spread in society and among the common folk: one of the condemned men prayed for the Tsar!... But which one of them? Does it matter? Perhaps Chernyshev did not hear, or perhaps he confused the names, or perhaps he told Nicholas that it was the one that Nicholas would have particularly wanted to see praying for him. The Tsar himself, only a few weeks previously, has specially exhorted Kakhovsky; the Decembrist had written to him from the fortress, and the Tsar saw Kakhovsky's confession as being due to his own (the Tsar's) personal efforts. And now there is this prayer of reconciliation by Kakhovsky, about which no one knew save the Tsar.

Standing beside the gallows, an officer, troubled and dispirited, witnesses how, 'when the condemned men were led to the scaffold, all five went up to each other, kissed each other and, turning back to back, because their hands were bound, shook hands and stepped resolutely onto the board...'

'All five'... However, Kakhovsky went onto the scaffold alone, and the remaining four went up in pairs: Ryleyev and Pestel, Muravyov and Bestuzhev-Riumin.

It would seem that in this last moments Kakhovsky stood aloof from his companions, but if there was any alienation, it was from his side alone! He could withdraw into himself, could stay aloof from the others. His situation was not easy; over recent weeks he had been subjected more than the rest to interrogations, felt isolated, could lay much of the blame on Ryleyev and other Northerners...

All kiss and shake hands, and Pestel and Muravyov do so again, already wearing the noose.

One of the witnesses sees the five by the gallows, and standing near to him a Frenchman: 'Officer De la Rue who had just arrived in St Petersburg in the retinue of Marshal Marmont, sent as ambassador to attend the coronation of the Emperor Nikolai Pavlovich. De la Rue was a school-friend of Sergei Muravyov-Apostol in some educational establishment in Paris, had not met him since that time, and saw him again only on the gallows.'

The educational establishment is, of course, the Hix boarding school. Twelve years earlier Marshal Marmont had surrendered Paris to Sergei Muravyov and thousands of his fellow-soldiers, and is now representing quite another dynasty at the coronation ceremony... The boarding school is twenty years in the past: the mother, Anna Semyonovna, the father, Ivan Matveyevich, leaving Spain, good marks in mathematics, Matvei, the new-born Ippolit, 'children, there is something I must tell you. In Russia there is slavery'...

And here, the priest, unable to watch any more, shouts out 'forgive and absolve you'. The trap-door on which the five are standing collapses, two are left hanging, but three fall to the ground. Who?

Names and details differ.

The eyewitness sees things with his own eyes ... but what is one to do if one cannot bear to watch?

Some say that two fell to the ground, others say three; either their vision grew hazy—three had fallen or, perhaps, two-three... Or perhaps the third fell a little later. How are we to know who fell? Who recognises their faces, distorted, a hood pulled over them before their last moment, and those present are in a state of shock...

Three are lying on the ground badly bruised. Two are hanging.

'They,' one of the friends will write, 'were perhaps dying a death of prolonged suffering, with each minute equal to a thousand years.'

'Sergei Muravyov was very badly hurt,' reports Ivan Yakushkin, who has his information from the priest. 'He broke his leg and could only manage to say: "Poor Russia! We cannot even hang properly!" Kakhovsky swore in Russian. Ryleyev said nothing.'

'Poor Russia! We cannot even hang properly!'

These words will be remembered, will be repeated in innumerable underground publications and will reach relatives and friends; the last words of Sergei Ivanovich—if such words were indeed spoken. The shocked observers hear one man speaking, about that all are agreed. But who is it who pronounces the last word?

'Kakhovsky swore for all he was worth.'

'Ryleyev cursed.'

'Of the three who had fallen, Ryleyev got to his feet covered in blood and, turning to General Pavel Kutuzov, who was in charge of the execution, said:

"You, General, no doubt came to watch us die. You may gladden your sovereign with the news that his wish is being fulfilled: you can see—we are dying a painful death."

"Then the furious voice of Kutuzov: 'Hang them again, and quick!'" disturbed the calm spirit of Ryleyev, ready to meet his death, the indomitable spirit of the leading conspirator blazed forth once more in the following answer:

"You mean bodyguard of a tyrant! Give the executioner your aiguillettes, that we will not have to die a third time."

The noose had, splitting off, evidently pulled up the hoods, returning to the condemned men the sight of the morning gone forever, the people, the smoke of the fires. It is impossible to imagine the psychological condition of these three men. Undoubtedly they said something, shouted, perhaps cursed.

It was thought that those who had fallen to the ground would have their sentences commuted, but the ever efficient Chernyshev hurried to carry through the second execution.

The bodies of the five were buried with such secrecy that even today no one knows with any certainty where their grave is located. A hundred years later, a small memorial was erected on the edge of Leningrad: it is probably here that they buried the five revolutionaries in one common grave...

Early on the morning of 13 July 1826, more than one hundred of the best officers in the Russian army, fine people, are led out to hear their sentences—penal servitude and exile; to the resounding blare of an orchestra, their epaulettes are torn off and their jackets burned; the air is filled with the smell of burning cloth... All look with particular pity at Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, who has lost first one brother, then the other... Many are astonished to see Lunin in the crowd. Recollections of how he behaved at this moment have survived: 'When the sentence had been read, he turned to all those standing nearby and said in a loud voice: "Gentlemen! This splendid sentence must be besprinkled," and carried out the command with perfect calm. It would have been marvellous if Adjutant-General Chernyshev could have seen it.'

Others recalled: 'When the sentence had been read, and the chief secretary Zhuravlyov, stressing every syllable, pronounced the final words: "And exile in Siberia forever!" Lunin who out of habit had hitched his trousers commented

to all present: "A fine 'forever'. I'm already over fifty years old." (And it was said that thereafter the word 'forever' was replaced in prison sentences by 'for life'.)

This account has provoked argument and doubt. Other prisoners did not hear any such witticism. Lunin was not over 50 years old but around forty. He was, however, such a legendary figure that rumour may well have ironised and besprinkled for him. Out of the hundreds of deeds for which he was famous, his contemporaries had the right to compose a few that are unknown...

Ahead lay the dungeon, and then Siberia.

There remains only one more incident to relate in this series of sentences and reprisals.

Travelling in 48 carts and under guard (2 officers and 5 armed non-commissioned officers for each company, and an armed private for each ten men) the Chernigovsky regiment is moving towards the sun, fever and the bullets of the Caucasus. There are 376 men, stripped of their former medals and insignia, but thankful to fate that they are not among the 120 who are to receive from 200 to 12 thousand strokes of the birch.

The new Chernigovsky regiment watches as the epaulettes are torn off Ivan Sukhinov and two other officers, who are then led round the gallows. A board has been nailed to the gallows with the names of those killed in the January fighting in 1826. Among them is the name of Ippolit Murav'yov-Apostol. 'When Sukhinov heard the words "to be sent into perpetual penal servitude in Siberia", he loudly remarked: "The sun also shines in Siberia."'

'However Prince Gorchakov, who was responsible for executing the sentences, would not allow him to finish, furiously shouting at him to keep silent and threatening to have him brought to trial a second time for this offence. It is even said that the chief-of-staff wanted to carry out this threat, but that another general refused.'

The reason for the refusal was not sympathy, but instructions: the business was to be completed as quickly as possible!

Three men from the lower ranks who were actively involved in the uprising were to be shot. However, at the last moment this sentence was commuted to flogging, and the soldiers were ordered not to beat their old comrades 'too severely'.

Is it not obvious that this was an instruction from the Tsar himself? The execution in St Petersburg, particularly the incident of the three who fell to the ground, had left an extremely painful impression. Furthermore, it had to be shown that the insurgents, the guilty men, were

officers who embroiled in the affair 'innocent soldiers'; thus the five hanged men, though they themselves could never know it, saved a few who were doomed...

Ivan Sukhinov, wearing irons, also moved off to Siberia—but on foot. The route was so long that even the supreme power in St Petersburg was unable to appreciate the distance. Six months later the governor of Irkutsk was angrily asked to explain why he had made no report on the delivery of Sukhinov and the other prisoners; Irkutsk sent back the respectful reply that the journey took about a year on foot, and that the prisoners had probably not yet covered half the distance.

Sukhinov tramped through the mud, slowly marching east with a group of convicted criminals. Nor was this fighting, reckless temperament of the kind to resign itself. He was the same now as when he had dashed menacingly around the Ukrainian town seized by the revolutionaries, the same as when he had threatened to strangle a rude gendarme officer with his chains, and when he had exclaimed 'The sun shines even in Siberia'. During the long march he and several of his desperate companions agreed to attempt an escape. When they arrived at the Zerentui mine near the Chinese border they decided to make their move. However, one of the criminals betrayed them and reported the planned escape to the authorities. Although they strangled the traitor, their plan was known. A fresh trial was rapidly held and death sentences pronounced. However, what preyed on Sukhinov's mind was not execution, but the flogging that would precede the firing squad: he did not want to, could not, face humiliation, and the night before the execution he hanged himself...

He was, in effect, the sixth man to be hanged.

Today there is a small memorial to him in the township of Gorny Zerentui in Eastern Siberia.

**The Sun Also Shines
in Siberia**



'En route the convicts were healthy, did not lose spirit and were in good heart' (from the report of the state courier on the delivery of the Decembrists to Siberia).

'The convicts were healthy and showed no emotion, except that, on leaving Tobolsk, they expressed regret that they were being taken further' (from another report).

The Decembrists were taken, in carts and on foot, across Europe and Asia (Tobolsk, the capital of Western Siberia, was only the half-way point). Twenty-five roubles were allotted for food every thousand versts, but the police guard had already spent over one hundred roubles, and there was still no end in sight...

'I got my watch to ring in the darkness and, after the twelfth stroke I wished the coachman a happy New Year', this was how Maria Nikolayevna Volkonskaya welcomed in 1827 on her way from Moscow to join her husband in the penal settlement beyond Lake Baikal.

Somewhat different was the departure from the capital of the state inspector, Leonid Fedorovich Lvov, the young scion of a noble family. 'To have to survey such a remote, little-known region! And in Petersburg they thought that sable virtually ran wild in the streets of Irkutsk, and that in the fields one found not stones but nuggets of gold.'

The sorrowing mother of Leonid Lvov was comforted by the chief of the gendarme corps Count Benkendorf, who had himself, in his youth, travelled as far east as Tobolsk.

In a somewhat easy and familiar style, Lvov recalls in detail the preparations for his departure, and how Yekaterina Fedorovna Muravyova (the mother of the Decembrists Nikita and Alexander Muravyov, and the aunt of Lunin) brought in parcels every day.

Lvov took seven weeks to reach Irkutsk—his gold embroidered court dress inspired in the local authorities the desire 'to be of every assistance'; during the crossing of the river Yenisei the ferrymen were ordered to shout out the number of bottles emptied and tossed overboard. The entire journey became a series of carousals.

At last the young inspector arrives at the house of the governor-general of Eastern Siberia.

'Imagine my surprise,' he recalls, 'when (after dinner

we sat in the drawing room smoking cigars) I heard the sound of musical instruments and a Mozart quintette with clarinet... I was so moved by that heavenly music, so reminded of my own home and family, that, to my shame, I could not stop the tears!' The first violin was played by Alexeyev, an ex-convict, once a music conductor with Count Arakcheyev, sentenced to penal servitude in Siberia for the murder of the cruel, blood-thirsty Nastasia (Arakcheyev's mistress), and who had now completed his sentence; the clarinet was played by the exiled Pole Kraszecki.

The days of the Decembrists sometimes seem to us to be long, long ago, separated from us by mountain-ranges of events, revolutions, generations, wars, reigns and governments. And yet, in fact, they are not so distant at all. The daughter of the Decembrist Zavalishin lived through the seige of Leningrad (1941-1944), while the daughter of another Decembrist, Vedenyapin, was still alive in 1938.

However, by 1925, a hundred years after the uprising, the sad graves of those who did not return home, of those who, in this corner of the world, experienced extraordinary happiness and the most ordinary of misfortunes, had grown over with grass and weeds, lost their inscriptions, or, sometimes, disappeared altogether.

In the Moscow Archives, in the section on the Muravyovs, among various business papers, letters, documents and plans, there is a unique article which would make a magnificent museum exhibit: a large white kerchief onto which someone carefully copied in Indian ink documents related to the departure for Siberia of Alexandra Grigoryevna Muravyova, the wife of Nikita Mikhailovich Muravyov.

Most probably this is the work of the daughter of Alexandra and Nikita Muravyov—Sophia Nikitichna Bibikova (in Siberia everyone called her Nonushka), who treasured every relic of the Decembrist movement.

The first column of fine handwriting contains the notification sent on 14 December 1826 by General A. Potapov: Muravyova was granted "imperial permission" to go to Siberia—on certain conditions listed therewith. The second column contains a letter from the governor of Irkutsk, Zeidler, given to Alexandra Muravyova in Irkutsk on 3 February 1827. It is known that Zeidler had received special instructions according to which he was to do all in his power to dissuade the women from going any further. Together with the letter is Muravyova's written undertaking signed in Chita: 'February 23rd, 1827: I,

the undersigned, firmly resolved to share the fate of my husband, state convict Nikita Muravyov, sentenced by the Supreme Criminal Court, and to live in that factory, mining or any other settlement where he will be kept, provided permission to do so is granted by the commandant of the Nerchinsk mines, Major-General and Cavalier Leparsky, do hereby undertake to observe in good faith the articles recorded below and put before me by the commandant; otherwise, for the smallest deviation from the regulations on this issue, I will be liable to prosecution under the law.'

The third column contains another written undertaking by Alexandra Muravyova, signed on 24 September 1830 in Petrovsky Zavod, in which 'having the wish to live with my husband in the prison barracks...' she accepts conditions additional to those put before her in February 1827.

The last document copied onto the kerchief is a circular sent out by Benkendorf on 6 December 1830, referring to 'the graciousness of the monarch' and granting permission for windows to be installed in the Petrovsky prison.

These documents constitute, in effect, a brief record of the first years spent by the Decembrist wives in the penal servitude area.

Eleven women shared the Siberian banishment of the revolutionaries. The poet Vyazemsky, on learning that women were following their menfolk into exile, said: 'God grant that they at least may redeem the baseness of our age. Our thanks to the women; they will inscribe a few glorious lines into our history.'

'They left everything,' wrote Dostoyevsky, 'noble rank, wealth, connections and family, sacrificed everything in the name of the highest moral duty, the freest duty there can be. Themselves totally innocent, they suffered over the course of a long twenty-five years everything that was suffered by their condemned husbands... They inspired us to take a new road.'

Princess Trubetskaya was the first to arrive. On catching sight, through a crack in the prison wall, of her husband, a former prince, wearing irons, dressed in a torn sheepskin coat with a piece of rope for a belt, and his face totally changed, she fainted.

'Yekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya,' a contemporary recalled, 'was not beautiful, nor shapely, of average height, but when she spoke—she was all enchantment to look at, she simply enchanted the listener with her calm, pleasant voice and even, intelligent and kind speech, you could listen to her forever. Her voice and words bore the stamp of her warm heart and well-educated mind

formed by carefully chosen reading and acquaintance with famous diplomatic figures.'

Maria Volkonskaya was the second to arrive.

'Sergei rushed towards me; the clatter of his chains amazed me: I did not know that he was in irons. The severity of this incarceration enabled me to understand the degree of his suffering. The sight of the irons so inflamed and moved me that I threw myself on my knees before him and kissed his chains, and then him also. The warden standing at the doorway and unable to come in because of lack of room, was amazed at my display of admiration and respect for my husband, whom he addressed familiarly and treated as a convict.'

Then Alexandra Muravyova arrives, gentle, delicate, totally devoted to her beloved Nikita.

In September 1827, frightened of the influence of the revolutionaries and of 'a general rebellion in the whole of Eastern Siberia', the government brings all the Decembrist convicts together in one place.

Chita was then a miserable little village of only 18 houses. The authorities in St Petersburg were poorly acquainted with geography, and assumed that there were mines across the whole of Siberia (for the Decembrists had been sentenced to penal servitude in mines). However, there were no mines in the vicinity of Chita, and therefore the prisoners were set to work cleaning state-owned cattle-sheds and stables, or sweeping the streets; sometimes they dug earthworks or worked at the mill.

The cramped prison quarters, the sound of the chains, removed only when the prisoners went to the baths or to church, irritated people whose nerves were already exhausted. However, life together also had many advantages.

'The dungeon united us all together, gave us mutual support and, finally, thanks to our angels of rescue, the ladies, united us with that world from which we had been separated forever by political death, united us with our relatives, gave us the desire to live in order not to destroy those who loved us and whom we loved, and finally, it gave us the material means of existence and provided moral food for our spiritual life.' These are the words of Mikhail Bestuzhev (one of the five Bestuzhev brothers who suffered from repression—in addition to the executed Bestuzhev-Riumin).

The women lived close to the prison in simple log houses, cooked their own food, went to fetch water, chopped firewood, lit the stoves. Not everything, however, went smoothly.

The would-be wife of Ivan Annenkov, arrived in Siberia

as Mademoiselle Pauline Gueuble: by 'Royal graciousness' she was allowed to join her life to that of a 'state convict'. In her reminiscences written after her return from Siberia, Annenkova, who was by then known as Paulina (or Praskovya) Yegorovna, provides a lively and colourful description of the difficulties she encountered while trying to obtain this permission.

The hasty, frivolous and, at first, completely banal love affair between a dashing officer in the horse guards and a young and charming French modiste had, in extraordinary circumstances, turned into a love-story that became not only a subject of conversation in the salons of high society, but also the theme of a novel (Alexandre Dumas' *The Fencing Master*, in which there is little truth and a great deal of fantasy), and also of an opera (the first edition of *The Decembrists* by Yu. A. Shaporin was called *Pauline Gueuble*).

'Our ladies often came to watch how I prepared dinner, and asked me to teach them how to make soup, how to bake a pie, etc... When a chicken had to be cleaned, they tearfully admitted that they envied my ability to do everything, and bitterly criticised themselves for not being able to do anything, although, of course, the fault was not theirs. Their upbringing had not prepared them for such a life ... whereas from my earliest years I had learnt it all through poverty.'

On arriving in Siberia, all the women had to make a signed statement renouncing family life. They were allowed to see their husbands for an hour twice a week in the presence of an officer. Therefore the favourite pastime and sole entertainment of the women was to sit on a large rock opposite the prison and occasionally exchange words with the prisoners.

The soldiers chased them away rudely, and on one occasion they struck Trubetskaya. Immediately the women sent a complaint to St Petersburg, and Yekaterina Trubetskaya deliberately organised what amounted to veritable receptions in front of the prison. These conversations had one inconvenience: one had to shout to make oneself heard. However, how much pleasure it gave to the prisoners!

Nonetheless, penal servitude is still penal servitude. One day, when Alexandra Grigoryevna Muravyova, was in her husband's cell, she was subjected to abuse by a drunken officer. Her cry for help brought all the prisoners running to the scene, including her brother; they seized the maddened officer, but he ordered the soldiers on guard to come to his aid. It was only with great difficulty that they succeeded in calming down the conflict and preventing

the soldiers from 'putting down a revolt'—the penalty for revolt was death.

Camilla

Among the inmates in the Transbaikalian prison was a young member of the Southern Society, Ivashev. One of his friends, also a 'protege of Pestel', described a remarkable thing that happened to him. Ivashev could not accept his situation and was constantly restless. 'We often spoke of this between ourselves, and I tried, as much as I could, to give him moral support and inspire him with greater determination. Nothing helped. He was sad, gloomy, pensive. Once, while we were working, one of the men took me to one side and told me that Ivashev was about to do something very foolish which could cost him his life, and that he had decided to tell me about it so that I, for my part, might attempt to dissuade Ivashev. He then informed me that Ivashev had decided to escape, and told me everything he knew about the plan.'

Ivashev's friend immediately went to speak to him, and Ivashev admitted that he was firmly resolved to go ahead with his attempt because he could no longer bear life in the dungeon, and thought it would be better to die than to continue to live in such conditions. He would not heed any objections and had fixed upon the following day for his senseless undertaking. 'Finally, on seeing that all my arguments were in vain, I said to him firmly: "Listen, Ivashev, in the name of our friendship I am asking you to delay the execution of your plan for one week. During that week we shall discuss the undertaking thoroughly and assess calmly and coolly all the arguments in favour and against, and if you are still of the same opinion, then I promise I will not try to hinder you." "And what if I refuse to delay for a week?" retorted Ivashev. "If you do not agree," I replied heatedly, "you will force me to do out of love for you something that is repulsive to me—I will immediately request to see the commandant, and I will tell him everything. You know me sufficiently well to be sure that I will be acting out of conviction, for this is the only way left to save you."

When, a few days later, they returned to the subject, a sergeant suddenly came in and told Ivashev that the commandant wanted to see him. The prisoner left and did not return for two hours. His friends began to worry, fearing that his plan to escape had been discovered. Finally Ivashev returned, deeply perturbed, and showed them two letters which had been handed to him by the com-

mandant: one was from his mother, and the other from the mother of a young lady, a Mrs Le Dantu, who spoke of the love of her daughter for Ivashev. The daughter had fallen dangerously ill as a result, but nonetheless refused to tell Ivashev her secret. She would not have revealed it, even now, were it not that he had been struck by misfortune and she might, by her presence, be able to alleviate his lot, she had decided to break convention and offer her hand. The mother of Ivashev had sent this letter to the chief of gendarmes, Benkendorf, and he, with the Tsar's permission, had instructed the commandant to inquire of Ivashev whether he was prepared to marry Miss Le Dantu.

Ivashev remembered the girl very well. She had been brought up together with his sisters, and he had even found her attractive, though, of course, no thought of marriage with her had ever entered his head. 'He was very worried as to whether she would be happy with him in his present situation, whether he would be able to make up to her for her sacrifice by his devotion, and whether he might not later begin to repent of his action. We knew his gentle character, knew all his fine qualities, we were certain that they would be happy, and therefore we unhesitatingly advised him to agree. Finally he decided to accept the proposal. Naturally, after this decision there was no further talk of escape. If I had not forced him to wait for a week, it could easily have happened that these letters would no longer have found him in Chita, they would have arrived when he was already a hunted man, and therefore not only would there have been no marriage, but Ivashev himself would undoubtedly have perished one way or another.

'The marriage took place in Petrovsky Zavod.'

A great deal has been written about Ivasheva-Le Dantu. 'She was a delightful creature in every respect,' recalled Maria Volkonskaya. They had become friends through correspondence, then, in Petrovsky Zavod, Maria Nikolayevna helped the young French girl to settle down, and she lived in Volkonskaya's house until the wedding. One of Ivashev's relatives wrote the following about Camilla to her future husband, who had only vague, youthful memories of her: 'Her simplicity and amiability are so natural that it is impossible not to predict, not to guarantee the happiness for which you are destined.' The water-colour portrait of Camilla painted during her first year at Petrovsky Zavod fully confirms this description.

'Marriage to her,' continues Volkonskaya, 'was a great happiness for Ivashev, who until then had been in total

despair.' Now that the son of a general, a wealthy landowner and guards officer, Vasili Ivashev, had become a state convict, stripped of political and property rights, the vast difference in their social status had lost any meaning. The poor governess, Camilla Le Dantu, was able, with the unreserved blessing of the parents, to become the wife of this offspring of an ancient and wealthy branch of the nobility. Moreover, Camilla proved to be indeed a charming, modest and noble-natured woman, an excellent wife and mother, with a reasonable education and not without talents (she was very musical, as was Ivashev, played the piano beautifully, and sang, her duets with Maria Volkonskaya were particularly successful). Despite its fortuitous nature, the marriage of Camilla and Vasili Ivashev proved to be a happy one, and when Camilla Petrovna died eight years later at the age of thirty one, her husband survived her by only one year, dying suddenly on the anniversary of her funeral.

During the first months at Chita, a common cause united all the Decembrists—a plan for a collective escape. They were to sail down the Ingoda river to the Argun and the Amur, and from there on to Sakhalin and Japan.

According to one of his companions, Mikhail Lunin undertook all kinds of preparations for his escape, but, having thought over everything, could not decide to go through with it. There were all the guards, both on foot and on horse, nearby and beyond lay the vast, bare and hungry expanses of Siberia. Whether the attempt was successful or unsuccessful, there would still be the same responsibility for new sufferings and the increased surveillance of their other comrades scattered over Siberia.

Another recalled: Lunin deliberately refused to eat either fish or meat, and joked that this was in order to leave himself weak, otherwise he would be unable to resist the temptation to jump the wall.

In the summer of 1830, the Decembrists in Chita were moved 634.5 versts nearer to Europe—and away from the allure of the border. That same summer a group was moving along one of the roads across Inner Asia. 'Ahead walked Zavalishin in a round hat with an enormous brim and wearing some kind of black coat of his own invention, similar to a quaker smock. Small in height, he held in one hand a staff taller than himself, and in the other a book. Behind him came Yakushkin in a jacket *a l'enfant*. Volkonsky was wearing a short, buttonless woman's jacket, others were in long sexton's frock-coats, others in Spanish cloaks, blouses... A European would have thought we were the inmates of a madhouse out for a walk.'

The arrival at Petrovsky Zavod was not a cheerful one: in Chita they had enjoyed more freedom; all thoughts of escape were now pointless, secretly cherished hopes of an amnesty faded away—for why, then, should it be necessary to build a stout new prison.

Before they had set out for Petrovsky Zavod, the wives of the Decembrists had appealed to the chief of gendarmes for permission to live in the prison with their husbands. Now permission was granted.

On 28 September 1830, Yekaterina Trubetskaya wrote to her mother in St Petersburg:

'This life lived from meeting to meeting that we had to bear for so long has cost us all too much for us to be willing to undergo it again. It would have been beyond our strength.'

That same day Natalya Dmitriyevna Fonvizina writes: 'You cannot imagine this prison, this gloom, this dampness, this cold, all these deprivations. It will be a miracle if we all keep our health and our heads, for it is so dark that it is impossible to do anything.'

Fonvizina's fears regarding 'keeping our heads' were not without cause: of the 50 prisoners at Petrovsky Zavod, two later went insane. Natalya Dmitriyevna herself suffered from attacks of uncontrollable terror.

The women immediately began a battle with St Petersburg and Siberian authorities to ease the conditions of imprisonment.

Old connections in the capital and even the personal acquaintance of some of the Decembrists' wives with the Tsar sometimes restrained the prison guards from arbitrary actions. The charm of the young and educated women occasionally softened both the administration and the felon convicts. 'They were our guardian angels,' wrote one of the convicts, 'their purses were open for anyone in need, and they asked for a hospital to be set up for the sick.'

Relatives and friends wrote to the prisoners, but the latter were forbidden to reply (the right to correspond was granted only when they settled in exile after penal servitude). This was yet another indication of the government's plan to isolate the Decembrists. But this intention was frustrated by the women.

Each of them wrote 10, and sometimes 20 letters every week. Volkonskaya and Trubetskaya conducted a particularly large correspondence, for they were personally acquainted with many of the relatives of the convicts, and they wrote up to 30 letters for each post.

Sometimes the burden of correspondence was so great that the women had no time left to write to their own parents

and children. 'Do not be angry with me, my dear, good Katya and Liza, for the brevity of my letter,' Alexandra Ivanovna, the wife of the Decembrist Davydov, wrote to her daughters. 'I have so many cares at the moment, and so many letters to write for the next post, that I had difficulty in finding the time to write even these few lines.'

And what a correspondence it was! The post was collected once a week. Moreover, the letters passed through a triple censorship: the commandant (who sometimes read up to a hundred letters for a single post), the office of the Irkutsk governor-general, and then the authorities in St Petersburg. The letter spent 6 to 8 weeks crossing the country, overcoming such obstacles as lack of roads, overflowing rivers, snow-storms and wrong addresses.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the letters journeyed for months before arriving at their destination. Maria Volkonskaya wrote 9 letters to her mother-in-law, who had died, and herself received letters from her relatives passing on love and kisses to her child, who had died three months before in Chita. On the day countess Chernysheva died, a letter arrived from her daughter, Alexandra Muravyova, inquiring: 'My poor dear mother, how are things with you now?'

Often letters were lost, and not only in Siberia, but in the two capitals, St Petersburg and Moscow.

On 28 November 1836, Yekaterina Sergeyevna Uvarova wrote from St Petersburg to her brother, Mikhail Lunin, in the village of Urik, where he was already living in exile after completing his sentence of penal servitude: 'Your letters No. 8 of 27 September, and No. 9 of 4 October, both in the same packet, were lost by the gendarme. However, this misfortune was resolved by a janitor who, on the following day, that is, on Sunday 15th, came to tell me of the packet he had found while sweeping the street. To my great fortune, this good man was able to read.'

Alexandra Muravyova, born Countess Chernysheva, did not live long—she died on 22 November 1832. Her death shocked everyone with its tragic suddenness. Lunin's sister wrote to him from St Petersburg: 'I have had many sorrows, dear brother! But this is the first that has caused me to doubt the goodness of God. Her death has broken so many hearts at once'.

It was not that Alexandra Grigoryevna was only 28 years old, nor that she was the first victim of penal servitude among the Decembrists. Alexandrina Muravyova was loved by everyone. None of the other wives of the Decembrists

received such enthusiastic praise in the reminiscences of contemporaries. Even women, who were very severe judges of their own sex, women as different as Maria Volkonskaya and Paulina Annenkova, were unanimous in their opinion of Alexandra: 'She was a saint who died at her post.'

To some extent this universal praise and admiration can be explained by the premature and tragic death of Alexandra Grigoryevna. However, this is, of course, not the main reason.

Alexandrina Muravyova was the embodiment of the eternal feminine ideal: gentle and passionate, dearly loved by her husband, a selfless and devoted wife, an attentive and loving mother: 'she was love incarnate', 'in love and friendship she knew no such thing as the impossible'.

Her life was one of 'unending ardour which, slowly but surely, sapped her inner strength'. Brought up in the patriarchal tradition, Alexandrina Muravyova had exceptionally strong family ties. Her love for her husband developed into concentrated adoration. Her feelings for her children were equally strong. With such a character and heart, what heavy sorrows she had to bear since 1825: the sudden arrest of her husband, and then of her brother, separation from her parents and sisters and, the greatest grief of all, from her three children; a few months after her departure for Siberia her son died, followed in 1828 by her mother and, three years later, her father; in Petrovsky Zavod two infants died; her daughters, left in Moscow with grandmother Muravyova, were ill; and their 'Siberian' daughter, Nonushka, was weak and sickly, causing her mother constant anxiety.

Despite her passionate attachment to her family, Alexandrina Muravyova never shut herself off within it. 'A distinguishing feature of Alexandra Grigoryevna,' Ivan Yakushkin recalled, 'was her warm-heartedness, which flowed outwards, almost independently of herself, to all who surrounded her.' However, if you take everything close to heart, you soon grow old. It is therefore no surprise to learn that six months before her death she wrote to her mother-in-law, Ye. F. Muravyova: 'I am growing old, dearest mother. You cannot imagine how many grey hairs I have.'

Nikita Muravyov turned grey at the age of 36, on the day his wife died.

The coffin was made by Nikolai Bestuzhev. Over the grave, in which lie Alexandra Grigoryevna and two of her children, a memorial was erected with a little chapel and an icon-lamp. The lamp continued to burn for another 37 years, while the Decembrist Gorbachevsky, who did not

return home after the amnesty, was still alive.

The chapel is preserved to this day.

'All in the World for Friendship's Sake'

In Irkutsk, above the river Angara, stands the Znamensky Monastery. It was erected in 1762, when the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the Decembrists overthrew Peter III and put Catherine II on the throne.

We enter the monastery grounds, and sadness sweeps over us together with the stillness. We are in a kind of Decembrist necropolis uniting in death people whose paths through life were very different.

Immediately inside the gates, only a few steps away, is the grave of Yekaterina Trubetskaya, the first to follow her husband to Siberia; she died here 28 years later, two years before the amnesty.

A little further on is another gravestone: Nikolai Alekseyevich Panov.

How many Decembrists do we know? If one were to ask a young, educated Russian which Decembrists he knows, he would naturally name the five who were executed, then Lunin, the Muravyovs... However, very few have heard of Nikolai Panov, though the authorities included him in category I, among the most dangerous state convicts, those who were first condemned to death, and then had their sentences commuted to many years of penal servitude. There were only 31 in category I, and one of them was Panov. However, there are no books or pamphlets about him. Thanks to Nikolai Bestuzhev, who drew the portraits of all his companions in exile, we can see the face of Panov, his prominent, unhappy eyes and large moustache. From the recollections of the Decembrists we learn that he was a sturdily-built blond of slightly less than average height and with a lively temperament.

The dates carved out on the Irkutsk gravestone are simple and sad: 1803-1850. Just 47 years. His life, as we well know, is sharply divided into two parts—22 years before the uprising, and 25 years after, in penal servitude and exile. He died six years before the amnesty.

Gorbachevsky, who had a very retentive memory, recalling his companions in exile many years later said about Panov: 'I don't remember his Christian name or patronymic.'

Many of the Decembrists left memoirs, but Panov did not.

Many of the Decembrists' letters have survived—but almost none belonging to Panov. Probably he wrote little. Perhaps he had no one to write to?

Prior to the uprising he was engaged to be married.

However, he was never married. Many married in Siberia, Panov did not. Perhaps, who knows, he preserved all his life the memory of that girl, unknown to us, who shortly before the uprising promised to become his wife, but never did.

Retiring, ordinary, unremarkable Panov, a lieutenant of the Grenadier Guards, had served for five years before attaining this rank. Ten years later he might have become a colonel, and might have been made a general in his old age.

In Panov's file it is noted that he did not know 'about the secret plan concerning an insurrection'. What is more, he was accepted into the secret society less than a month before the uprising. When the investigation committee asked him what caused him to join the society, Panov answered:

'As its purpose was, according to the words of the member who accepted me, the common weal ... I decided, even though he did not inform me either of a plan or of the means of accomplishing it, to join.'

Panov asked no questions. He believed what he was told immediately and stayed with his companions to the end, calmly and without hesitation. Possibly he had thought and decided earlier, when he was still studying and, as can be seen from the short answer he gave at the investigation, he studied considerably: 'In order to supplement my knowledge, I took lessons in history and geography, mathematics and military science, French literature and, finally, Italian. 'When Count Benkendorf, who interrogated him, asked: 'At what time and from where did you acquire liberal ideas?' the reply was: 'I doubt if I could state exactly the beginning of my liberal ideas, but I acquired them basically from reading about revolutions; then, as a young man, I spoke freely, at random, without attributing any significance to my words, but when I learned about the existence of the society and became a member, my liberal ideas were reinforced.'

To do something for the common weal... Could there be any hesitation! Above all else Panov valued friendship. The investigators inquired about the mysterious ring he wore. He explained that it was a memento of friendship, as a sign of which some of the members of the society exchanged rings (similar to the cast-iron rings exchanged by Lyceum pupils), and he read a line from a poem by Vasili Zhukovsky, which was engraved on the inside of the ring: 'All in the World for Friendship's Sake'.

So, Panov was not among the leaders of the society, was virtually ignorant of the planned insurrection—yet was nonetheless placed in category I. Why? What for?

The story by Stefan Zweig about the composer of the *Marseillaise* is called 'The Genius of One Night'. Panov could have been the genius of one morning, the cloudy morning of 14 December, when he almost took power and decided the fate of the insurrection and the fate of Russia.

There is no work devoted to this modest grenadier lieutenant, but he is present in all the accounts about the events of that December day. Around Panov one can reconstruct that day when the insurgents lined up on Senate Square, and the grenadiers hurried to join them, led by the young, the reckless, the enthusiastic, but, alas, the over-disciplined Panov.

On the evening before, at Ryleyev's flat. The plan of the uprising is being decided. Noise, exclamations, many boasts. When asked how many soldiers each of them can muster, only the Bestuzhev brothers and Alexander Sutgoff give an accurate answer. 'Peace be with you, men of action and not of words,' says Ryleyev. Sutgoff answers also on behalf of his regimental comrade, Panov. Nor is he mistaken. On the morning of the following day, the 24-year-old lieutenant Sutgoff brings out his company, and the other seven companies of the Grenadier Guards are brought out by the 22-year-old Panov. Later Mikhail Bestuzhev recalled: 'All seven companies, as if at some magic signal, seized weapons, collected ammunition and poured out of the barracks. Panov, who was not very tall, was carried out aloft.' The commander of the regiment calls desperately to the soldiers to halt, but without any result; they are under the command of the small lieutenant, and the colonel is no longer a colonel.

The day before Panov was instructed to join his companions. He does not know either the plan of action or the aim of the uprising. The lieutenant is obeying his instructions. Together with his soldiers he first passes the Peter-and-Paul fortress, which he could easily take and thus ensure victory. However, he has no such instruction, and he moves on, emerges onto the Palace Square and even succeeds in penetrating with his grenadiers into the palace grounds: he thinks that the palace has already been seized by the insurgents. He then realises that he was mistaken and turns back. A thousand soldiers could have taken the palace with ease. However, again Panov has no such instruction; his task is to join his comrades. He is told that they are on Senate Square, and he marches off in that direction, passing the artillery, which would also have been easy to seize. At this point the regiment meets the new Tsar, Nicholas, to whom it appears that the end has come, for at that moment there are only a few rallied

around him, while a thousand insurgents are marching towards him. But no, the soldiers, having called out to the stupefied emperor 'Hurrah, Constantine' (a symbolic gesture of disobedience, for they had been ordered to shout 'Hurrah, Nicholas'), turn onto the square. Many years later the Tsar will remember those moments as the most unpleasant, the most decisive in his life.

Thus, several times that day the young lieutenant might have changed the course of the uprising and the destiny of the Russian empire, but he faithfully adheres to the agreement reached the day before, and, after all, lieutenants should not take decisions for colonels. He goes to join his friends in the formation on the square, and a few hours later the cannon he failed to seize fire on the revolutionaries, dispersing them.

We learn of Panov's attempts to restrain those taking flight and his attempt to hide.

'At the second shot the crowd dispersed, and although I attempted to hem them in from the front, I did not succeed. Finally I myself was swept up in the flight along Galerny Street, where I was pushed into the gate to the house of Mr Osterman; I entered the drawing room and saw the family, consisting of several ladies and two officers of the Imperial Guard retinue; also there were Mr Bestuzhev and a guards officer whose name I do not know. I stayed there until the evening and, having requested a round hat from the mistresses of the house and left behind my shako, I put on a civilian overcoat which a stranger had given me while I was still with the soldiers, took a cab at the Blue Bridge and drove to Ertelev Street, to the house of Colonel Belavin, where my cousin Panov has a flat. There I spent the night and, having sent a man to find out what had happened to the regiment, I learned that the soldiers and many of the officers had been taken to the fortress. I then decided to go there myself and surrender. Today I was brought to the palace under guard.'

He was not caught, but gave himself up with honour. In any other case such an action would have served to mitigate the sentence—but not in his.

The file on Panov is one of the briefest, containing only fifteen pages. During the six months he spends in the fortress he is interrogated only a couple of times: everything is clear—for common weal he recently joined a secret society and raised a thousand soldiers in revolt.

Kakhovsky, who accepted Panov into the Secret Society, tries to take all the responsibility on himself; he asks the Investigation Committee to take into account the fact that Panov is engaged to be married.

Kakhovsky is sentenced to be hanged, Panov is given the next severest sentence. Tsar Nicholas will never forget those dreadful moments when his fate hung by a hair; he will not forgive this lieutenant for the horror he experienced.

The Investigation Committee was well aware of all the gradations within the secret societies. Panov was not one of the leaders, nor one of the theoreticians and organisers. However, probably the authorities saw it as particularly dangerous that such an ordinary, statistically average officer should begin to support revolution. When such men go into action palaces crumble! Therefore the list of the most serious state criminals, which contains the names of Generals Volkonsky, and Yushnevsky, senior officers Trubetskoy, Davydov and Nikita Muravyov, the names of Pushchin, Yakushkin and other recognised and famous leaders of the movement, also includes two young friends and lieutenants, Nikolai Panov and Alexander Sutgoff, who between them had brought 1,250 soldiers out onto the square.

The file on Panov contains the statement: 'On 14 December, when the regiment had been lined up, Panov, taking advantage of the love the soldiers had for him, moved the regiment out!

'Taking advantage of the love the soldiers had for him'—an unusual phrase to find in an official document! The love of the soldiers—this is what is dangerous for the authorities. An officer who has behind him hundreds of devoted soldiers prepared to follow him onto the square in rebellion.

The rest is simple. Calmly, and with a kindly smile, neither repentant nor rebellious, Panov will drain the cup of penal servitude and exile. At intervals of a few months, the top-secret list of all condemned Decembrists, with a comment indicating who is where at that given moment, is placed on the table before the emperor. Even in the 1830s, after some time has passed since the events of 14 December, the list still opens with the names of the leaders whose fate was registered briefly: 'hanged'. Then came the living. Each time Nicholas came across the line which said: 'Nikolai Panov. At the Nerchinsk mines since 25 August 1827.' Twelve years later, in the list of convicts released from penal servitude, there suddenly appears the old army form: 'Nikolai Panov, 2nd' with more than one man bearing the same name, they were listed numerically: 1st-, 2nd-, 3rd, etc.).

This state convict caused the minimum of problems. In Siberia, living in exile, his resources few, he asks for nothing; indeed, had it not been for the help given him by the Decembrist colony, his situation would have

been very difficult. In 1839 he is only 36 years old, but he has already served in the Guards, was near to seizing power in Russia, spent years of penal servitude in Chita and Petrovsky Zavod, and is now beginning his life of exile near Irkutsk. His companion and fellow convict, Sutgoff will, when he is around fifty, finally receive the long-awaited permission to join the army in the Caucasus. No one will permit Panov to go to the Caucasus: one who wins the love of the soldiers should not be among soldiers; in any case by that time the former lieutenant of the Guards is ill, and he remains in Irkutsk. Alone. His brother and his family live somewhere near Voronezh. Somewhere his former fiancée is growing old.

And here we stand beside the quiet grave in the Znamensky monastery above the Angara River, thinking sadly about a man who passed away many years ago, about his short and curious life, simple and unusual, unremarkable and heroic, about a man who, in the noble name of friendship, gave up everything.

Semi-Freedom

One by one ex-princes, ex-counts, ex-colonels and ex-generals, now 'state criminals' completed their term of penal servitude. The road back home was closed to them, and they were transferred for settlement to various Siberian towns and villages where they at least had the right to write.

Lunin, Nikita Muravyov and his daughter Nonushka, the Volkonsky family and a few other ex-convicts settled in the village of Urik near Irkutsk.

'What will history have to say about you?' asked one condemned innocent man, referring to the abuses perpetrated by General Dmitri Bibikov, a man close to the Tsar.

'You may rest assured,' came the reply, 'that history will know nothing of my actions.'

Many books on history optimistically inform us that some Bibikov or other wished to bury the truth, but did not succeed.

However, sometimes it works the Bibikov way.

'The truth is all-powerful, and it will triumph. I must say that this does not correspond to reality.' Mark Twain, who said these words, would have had no difficulty citing examples. Of hundreds of uprisings, movements, important events, sayings and books there remain only the slightest traces emanating from the camp of the victors.

Who has heard the voice of the insurgents led by Spartacus? All we know of them comes from just a few pages

written by Appianus and Plutarch.

A few of the proclamations by Russian peasant leaders such as Pugachev, Razin and Bolotnikov are buried among thousands of official documents and books.

Therefore, the day comes when the state criminal Mikhail Lunin decides to write, before it is too late, a history of the Decembrists. Otherwise one might die, leaving no record save the minutes of the Investigation Committee, which contain nothing, or very little, about the most important aspect of the Decembrist movement—the desire to put an end to serfdom, absolutism, compulsory recruitment into the army and military settlements.

According to Lunin, false information about the convicted Decembrists 'was spread across the country among the poorly educated who believe everything they read, and among the clergy who believe everything they are ordered to.'

What, then, was the use of their protest, what did they go to Siberia for?

According to Lunin, 'The uprising on 14 December has little significance as a fact, but tremendous significance as a principle.'

That is true. But what is to be done? Surely they cannot rebel again—under the surveillance of watchful guards and informants?

'Our life is over,' says someone after the sentence has been read.

'Here, in Siberia, our life begins,' answers Lunin. He already has an unusually bold idea. All that is necessary is to wait until they are released for settlement, for while they are convicts they are forbidden to write, and in doing so they might let down their comrades; while once released for settlement they are more on their own.

Many of his friends try to persuade Lunin not to provoke 'the white bear', that is, the authorities. However, Mikhail Lunin writes, in his 'mockingly clear handwriting' (the words of the writer Yuri Tynyanov) a few essays which are as remarkable as they are dangerous: 'My aim is to disturb the universal apathy.'

'Michel ... has neither mother nor children, and he sees himself as such a solitary figure that his frankness can hurt no one.' Thus wrote Nikita Muraviov, who himself had a mother in St Petersburg and a daughter in Urik, speaking about his cousin.

Thirty years later, in *The Possessed*, Dostoyevsky recalled Lunin in connection with 'my revolutionary, Nikolai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin:

'I, for my part, would compare him to other departed

gentlemen about whom our society preserves a few legendary reminiscences. It was said, for example, about the Decembrist Lunin that all his life he deliberately sought out danger, that he revelled in it and turned it into a necessity of his nature; in his youth he would take part in duels over trifles; in Siberia he went after a bear, armed only with a knife, and he loved to go into the Siberian forests to meet with escaped convicts, who, I may point out, are far worse than any bear. There can be no doubt that these legendary gentlemen were able to experience, perhaps to a very great degree, the sensation of fear, otherwise they would have been calmer of character and the sensation of fear would not have become a necessity of their nature. The desire to conquer cowardice in themselves—this, of course, is what allured them. The unending delight of victory, and the awareness that nothing had ever defeated them—this is what attracted them. Lunin, for example, even before he was sentenced ... had fought against hunger and earned his bread with heavy labour purely and simply because he totally refused to obey the demands, which he believed to be unjust, of his wealthy father. It would seem that his understanding of struggle was many-sided; he assessed his steadfastness and strength of character not only by hunting bears or fighting duels. However, many years have passed since those times, and the neurotic, effete and divided nature of the people of our day does not even permit of the need for the direct and integral sensations so sought after then by those very different and restless gentlemen of former, happier times. Nikolai Vsevolodovich might, perhaps, have looked down on Lunin, might even have called him a coward constantly pretending to be brave, a strutting cockerel—though he would not have voiced his opinion out loud. If necessary he would have shot his opponent in a duel or hunted down a bear, and he would have defended himself against bandits in the forest just as successfully and fearlessly as Lunin, but without the slightest sensation of pleasure, without energy, without enthusiasm, even apathetically, solely out of unpleasant necessity. It was, of course, out of resentment that progress opposed Lunin, and even Lermontov.'

Dostoyevsky did not include the struggle against authority in the list of 'dangers', but it was clearly implied.

The author of *The Possessed* has no love for revolutionaries as such, but he makes an exception in the case of this Decembrist.

Stavrogin's behaviour is dictated to a large degree by necessity, by an external aim, and it is only for the sake

of this necessity that he will, if he must, take part in a duel or a bear hunt. 'I can do anything, if need be.'

First the Cause, then Man.

Lunin, on the contrary, derives pleasure from danger for its own sake—he needs it primarily for himself, out of an inner need to conquer himself. 'I can do anything, if I wish to.'

First Man, then the Cause.

And the secret essays written by Lunin are in the hands of his fellow exiles, and then of some of the inhabitants of Eastern Siberia; the manuscripts move slowly and invisibly west, to the capitals. With the help of his cousin Nikita Muravyov, and also Pyotr Gromnitsky of the Society of United Slavs, Lunin writes an authentic history of the Secret Society, a history of the uprising, of the arbitrary investigation and execution, and, finally, asks that a list of the judges be sent to him.

In St Petersburg, in 1826, the Decembrists were sentenced to death or penal servitude; near Irkutsk, around 1840, Mikhail Lunin sentences their judges to a shameful memory, and is confident that his cause will prevail.

The dungeon, the trial, the execution are described for the first time by an eyewitness.

'The death sentence was carried out furtively on the slope of the fortress where a phantom trial had taken place under cover of hastily summoned troops. The lack of skill or the bewilderment of executioners lengthened the sufferings of the condemned: three slipped free of the slack nooses, were badly bruised, bloodied, and hanged a second time. They died calmly, firmly convinced that their death was necessary as the proof of the truth of their words. The relatives were refused permission to collect the bodies of the hanged: they were buried in a trench at night, covered with lime, and the following day their executioners publicly thanked God that they had shed blood. After this state exploit, the main participants, who caused so much harm to government, succeeded in assuming posts at the helm.'

The conclusion is written in what is, for us, a strange manner resembling a psalm or homily, save that it was in French and flavoured with the 19th-century terminology. With the help of Gromnitsky, Lunin also prepared Russian and English texts.

'That power which dares everything, fears everything. Its general movement is nothing other than a gradual retreat covered by the corps of gendarmes, before the spirit of the Secret Society which envelopes it on all sides. One may get rid of people, but not of their ideas. The aspirations of the new generation strive towards the

Siberian wastes, where the noble exiles shine forth in the darkness intended to blot them out.

'Their life in exile is the constant proof of the truth of their principles. The power of their words even now forces a prohibition on their correspondence with relatives. Everything has been taken from them: social status, property, health, fatherland, freedom... But no one can take from them the sympathy of the people. This is revealed in the general and profound respect, which surrounds their sorrowing families, in the religious deference shown to the wives sharing their husbands' exile; in the way in which everything written by the exiles in the spirit of social protest is carefully collected. It is possible to deceive for a time the Russian mind, but nothing can deceive Russian popular sentiment.'

Thus wrote Mikhail Lunin, who for fifteen years was stripped of social status, property, fatherland and freedom.

He remained in good spirits while awaiting his second arrest, giving away his things to friends and acquaintances.

'I am ready, my friends, I am ready...'

Before long, information reached Benkendorf and the Tsar. On opening the delivered copy of Lunin's essay, Nicholas I saw on the very first page: 'The Secret Society belongs to history. The Society illumines our chronicles.' The Tsar had no use for such texts, and promptly issued an order.

On 27 March 1841, the fifteenth year the Decembrists had spent in Siberia, gendarmes arrived at the Siberian village of Urik and took Lunin away without saying what was to happen to him. He himself assumed that they were taking him to be shot, that is, to execution.

How did this second arrest take place?

26 March 1841, the afternoon: two couriers from St Petersburg come galloping into Irkutsk. The Deputy Governor-General Kopylov and the official for special affairs, Uspensky, read the orders.

11 p.m. Uspensky, five gendarmes, a gendarme captain and the Irkutsk police chief meet secretly at Kopylov's flat. Shortly afterwards all except the general set out in three troikas. Uspensky is in charge, but until they leave Irkutsk he tells them nothing.

27 March. After 1 a.m. Having driven for two hours through the spring night, they arrive in Urik, surround Lunin's house, knock at the gates and, without waiting for an answer, climb over the fence and break the lock. The servant Vasilich opens the door. Lunin is sleeping.

Around 2 a.m. 'the chief of police woke Lunin up and told him to get dressed as quickly as possible, as they had come to arrest him. Lunin answered very calmly: "You will

excuse me, gentlemen, but I am so weary from hunting. Let me sleep a while longer, and then you may take me wherever you will." When the chief of police began to protest that there was no time to be lost, that they must leave, Lunin called out to Vasilich: "Well, at least serve some tea to our unexpected guests! You will excuse me, I have only brick tea. And, Vasilich, you can serve up some of the goat I killed today."

The official noticed guns hanging on the wall, and he advised the chief of police to have them taken away. The latter told Lunin of the official's demand, to which the arrested man answered: "Yes, of course they must be taken away, a gun is a dreadful thing. These gentlemen are used to sticks." (A hint at flogging.)

From 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. A search is made and a list drawn up. Uspensky seals the house.

5 a.m. The arrested man is led out of the courtyard. Sergei Volkonsky arrives unexpectedly and just has time to ask Lunin whether he needs any money. Lunin has only 20 roubles with him. The story of what had happened has aroused the village. A crowd gathers in the courtyard, everyone shouting farewell, weeping, running after the sledge in which Lunin is sitting, and shouting after him: 'May God be with you, Mikhail Sergeevich, and grant that you return. We will keep a watch on your house and pray for you.' And one old peasant even managed to give him bread and cereal.

Lunin is not given time to say farewell to his cousins, Nikita and Alexander Muravyov. The sledge bells ring and Urik quickly disappears into the darkness forever.

27 March, after 7 a.m. Lunin is brought to the flat of General Kopylov and locked in a room off the hallway. Gendarmes stand guard at the door. News of his arrest spreads through Irkutsk and the vicinity, filling the exiles in the neighbourhood with anxiety.

After 8 a.m. Kopylov questions in Russian, Lunin, having noticed the general's weak point, naturally begins to answer in French. He says that quite some time ago he already 'put down a few ideas concerning the Secret Society with a view to presenting the affair in a favourable light, and, in my belief, in accord with the truth'. He declares, of course, (this is to deceive), that he did it for General Leparsky (who had died four years previously).

'No one helped me in this work; which, as a matter of fact, did not require the co-operation of others.'

27 March. Around 5 p.m. Lunin is ordered to prepare to leave, but is not told what is to be done with him.

'At that time the staging post in Irkutsk was run by a

branded ex-convict of 75 called Ankudinych, who was loved by everyone... The troika was ready, but Ankudinych had still not appeared. Then, from the top of the stairs, came a voice shouting "Wait, wait!" and, running down the stairs, Ankudinych pushed something into the driver's hand, saying: "As soon as Mikhail Sergeyevich gets into the sledge, give this to him... He'll need it! Well... God be with you!"

'Tears came to my eyes. This criminal giving Lunin a packet of banknotes was not, of course, expecting the money to be returned. Indeed, he could scarcely count on ever seeing Lunin again.'

Inspector-General Lvov (of whom mention has already been made and it is he who is recalling this episode) asks the gendarme major riding with Lunin to stop 30 versts out of town, and himself hurries home.

Meanwhile Lunin's friends, who have hastily collected together some money, are preparing to say their final farewell.

27 March. Evening. One of the most powerful and moving episodes in the Siberian history of the Decembrists has been preserved in Lvov's account:

'When I arrived home I found Artamon Muravyov, Panov, Yakubovich and Maria Nikolayevna Volkonskaya in a state of intense agitation; Maria Nikolayevna was hurriedly sewing banknotes into the lining of a coat, intending to put the coat on Lunin when we met him in the forest. We had to hurry!...

'We rode off. About 30 versts outside of town we stopped in the forest, 40 paces to one side of the coach road, in a clearing. It was still cold and very damp, there was still snow on the fields and, as Panov's cottage was not far away, he brought us a samovar and a rug, and we sat down to warm ourselves with tea and await our travellers. Despite Yakubovich's efforts to comfort us with tales and anecdotes, and those of Panov, who was already heating up the samovar for the third time, we were all very depressed. We heard bells... Everyone got up, and I ran out onto the road.

'Despite his attempts to hide his confusion, Lunin was deeply moved on seeing us; however, he laughed, as was his habit, and said to me in his hoarse voice:

"I told you that I was ready... They will hang me, or shoot me, or quarter me... I cut them to the quick! It's strange how in Russia everyone is invariably attached to something or someone... I am always attached to a gendarme."

'We gave him some tea, put the ready-prepared coat around

his shoulders and said farewell ... forever!

Lunin is being taken east, to the Nerchinsk area of penal servitude from where all the other Decembrists have already been transferred for settlement... He is taken away with instructions so secret that even the authorities in Irkutsk are not permitted to read them, and only the Nerchinsk director of mines, the top authority in that enormous territory, will open the envelope and read in the order the most ominous name of all the Siberian convict camps: Akatui.

The Siberian authorities used to threaten those 'incapable of correction': 'You will rot in Akatui!' Mikhail Bestuzhev described Akatui as 'a deep pit surrounded on all sides by mountains'.

Paulina Annenkova, the wife of the Decembrist Ivan Annenkov, was not alone in believing that near the Akatui lead mines 'the air is so suffocating, that up to 300 versts all around it is impossible to keep any poultry—they all die.'

Later, hundreds of people will do hard labour in the Akatui mines, survive to better times and leave behind their memoirs. However, when Lunin was sent there—'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here'; from here no one writes any letters or emerges to recount their reminiscences; no merchants come here, no tramps wander through: it is 200 versts from the Nerchinsk factory to this spot on the river Gazimur, near the Gazimur and Nerchinsk mountain ranges.

Between 1841 and 1845, Akatui was a more mysterious place than the upper Nile or the Polar wastes.

Here Mikhail Lunin will spend 1,696 days of his life, and we know almost nothing about them. Here he will die, and about this we also know almost nothing.

It was only 80 years and three revolutions later that the first, truly amazing documentary material appeared.

Sergei Mikhailovich Volkonsky, the grandson of the Decembrist Volkonsky, relates the following:

'In the spring of 1915, while going through an old bookcase in the flat I then occupied in St Petersburg, I unexpectedly came across a pile of papers... I instantly recognised the handwriting of my grandfather, the Decembrist Sergei Grigoryevich Volkonsky... Thirty years of life in Siberia (1827-1856) were gazing at me from the old shelves.'

Among the papers were twelve letters written by Lunin and conveyed secretly out of Akatui: nine of the letters, written in French, were addressed to Sergei and Maria Volkonsky, and three, in English and Latin, to the young boy, Mikhail Volkonsky. Volkonsky's grandson wrote about the impression created upon him by Lunin's last compositions:

'Everything about these letters, starting with the firm, clear and powerful handwriting, engraves itself onto the memory as something totally extraordinary; his strength of spirit, clarity of thought and precision of expression raise him to a unique position, not only singling him out from among his own contemporaries, but putting him in advance of his times.'

Lunin did not have the right to correspond, and only rarely (about once a year) managed to send messages via the priest or a sympathetic prison official.

'Lunin's arrest grieved us deeply,' recalls Maria Nikolayevna. 'I sent him books, chocolate for his chest and, under the guise of medicine, powdered ink with steel pens concealed inside, for everything had been taken from him and he had been strictly forbidden to write.'

Lunin to Sergei Volkonsky:

'My Dear Friend. The books, food and other things you sent with the priest reached me in September 1842. It would seem that I am destined for a lingering death in prison rather than a quick death on the scaffold. I am equally prepared for either. Let us move on to your affairs, which interest me as much as do my own. Have you arranged for a German tutor for Misha? It is extremely important that you do... The good father, who suggested that I write and gave me the opportunity to do so, is a fine man. Welcome him as a friend... Sell some of my things or my books so as to buy him a small present. Farewell, dear friend. Give my greetings to all our companions and to all who still remember me. I thank you with all my heart for your unlimited proofs of friendship. Your faithful friend to the end of my life, Mikhail.'

There are two ways of overcoming one's gaolers.

First: They exist, I am aware of it, but I am stronger than they. This method is available to many of the best.

However, a greater victory is also possible: they, as it were, do not exist at all, or represent the 'external world' no more than any other object. Then conquered suffering becomes benevolent disdain.

Food supplies, kitchen utensils and candlesticks improve living conditions and revive memories. Yet one can survive without them...

'I do not regret any of the things I have lost...'

'I am equally prepared for a lingering death in gaol and quick death on the scaffold...'

Lunin to Maria Volkonskaya:

'Your letters, Madame, raise my spirits and soften the harsh deprivation of my imprisonment. You are as dear to me as is my own sister.'

'To have some conception of my present situation one must read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or some other novel by Madame de Radcliffe. I am plunged in darkness, deprived of air, space and food, surrounded by robbers, murderers and forgers. My only distraction consists in attending floggings in the prison yard. My health is amazing, and my strength, far from ebbing, appears to be increasing. All of this has convinced me absolutely that one can be happy in any circumstance of life, and that only fools and beasts are unhappy in this world. Farewell, my dear sister in exile! Accept this assurance of the wholehearted friendship of your devoted Mikhail.'

In the meantime, Nikita Muravyov died in Urik aged only 46. 'Worth a whole academy', the author of a constitution for the future Russia—to what purpose? And where are the essays that they wrote together a few years previously?

The Daughter of Muravyov

Following the second arrest and departure of Lunin (1841), Volkonsky, Nikita and Alexander Muravyov and Dr. Wolf remained in Urik, 18 versts from Irkutsk. The Siberian children, Misha and Yelena Volkonsky and Nonushka (Sonya) Muravyova who had lost her mother several years earlier, were growing up. Thousands of versts away, in Moscow and St Petersburg, were those who dreamed of seeing their children and grandchildren, but one by one death claimed the ageing and inconsolable parents of the exiles. Meanwhile, the authorities conceived the idea that the children born in exile should change their surnames so that these 'new' members of the nobility might, thanks to imperial graciousness, be placed in aristocratic boarding schools and other similar institutions in the two capitals. Some of the Decembrists agreed, but the majority, including the Trubetskoys, the Volkonskys and Nikita Muravyov, politely refused, their 'ingratitude' provoking considerable anger in the Winter Palace.

When Lunin was arrested for a second time, his cousin Nikita Muravyov, who had assisted him in his 'offensive action', escaped only by a miracle. However, only a short while later, on 28 April 1843, Nikita Mikhailovich died unexpectedly.

In the reminiscences of Muravyov's daughter, written many years later and published only recently, we find: '28 April 1843... I found myself at such an early age without the guide whom I had fearlessly trusted in everything, seeing in him a champion of goodness and truth. The bright and powerful light which, like the dawn of a splen-

did summer day, had illuminated my early years, faded, the mists that surrounded me thickened, and my gaze sought in vain for a light by which to guide my hesitant steps.'

Nonushka (Sofia) Muravyova was just 14 years of age at the time.

And here is another reaction to this event, this time the official reaction by the authorities, in the form of a fairly large file in the Irkutsk archives entitled 'On the Death of the State Criminal Nikita Muravyov, and the Return of His Daughter to Russia'.

Eight days after the death of Muravyov, on 6 May 1843, the Irkutsk Governor-General Rupert reports on this event to Benkendorf as required 'and herewith requests permission to return the daughter, Sofia, to her grandmother, who, long before Muravyov's death, requested the authorities to permit her to take her granddaughter to live with her in Russia'. The 'humanity' of the malicious and self-seeking Rupert is explained by the fact that the grandmother, Yekaterina Fedorovna Muravyova, was a well-known and influential personage in Moscow and had many connections. Having, over a month later, learned of the death of Nikita, she herself requested the Tsar to let her granddaughter return, and on 18 June Benkendorf informed Rupert that Nicholas I 'wrote in his own hand on my report: "To attend the St Catherine Institute in Moscow at my expense".' Now, it would seem, the matter was finally settled, and Yekaterina Muravyova sent a moving letter to Irkutsk:

'Most Excellent and Gracious Wilhelm Yakovlevich!

'I will not speak of my grief, my suffering is beyond words, the loss of my dear son is a heavy blow for me to bear.

'On 18 June I received from Count Benkendorf notification that His Majesty the Emperor had graciously ordered that my unfortunate orphaned granddaughter be brought to Moscow, to the St Catherine Institute, and that I, for my part, assist you in arranging her departure. I am very worried that the child should have such a long journey ahead of her and, furthermore, her health is not strong, and I happen to know that, being unaccustomed to travelling, she feels unwell even when she makes only short journeys, and this causes her to fall ill. I am sending to you a close acquaintance of mine, a distinguished lady accustomed to travel, who took pity on my unhappy situation and my sufferings and, out of the goodness of her heart, agreed to make the journey and fetch the unfortunate and innocent child, my orphaned granddaughter, to Moscow.

'I therefore beg Your Excellency to delay the departure of my granddaughter until the arrival of the aforementioned

lady, who is to leave Moscow in a few days.

'I enclose herewith two thousand roubles in notes to be given to my unfortunate son, Alexander Mikhailovich Muravyov, so that he may make all the necessary preparations for my granddaughter's journey.

'With heartfelt gratitude and sincere respect I remain, Your Excellency, your faithful servant, Yekaterina Muravyova.'

Mrs Bostrom, the widow of a general (described in official documents as 'a widow of many years and accustomed to travelling) had not yet left Moscow when a codicil to imperial graciousness left St Petersburg on its way to Rupert, reaching Irkutsk, as one might expect, before the much-travelled widow. Nicholas I had remembered one small detail, and Benkendorf explained: 'His Majesty wishes to place the girl Sofia in the St Catherine Institute ... under the ordinary name of Sofia Nikitina...¹ I have the honour to request Your Excellency to instruct that the above-mentioned orphan be registered simply as the girl Sofia Nikitina in all documents.'

There was now no one to protect the girl against this change of name. While Nikita Mikhailovich Muravyov was still alive, even the Tsar had not succeeded in turning Nonushka, Sofia Muravyova, into the plain Sofia Nikitina. Now no one troubled to ask—they played the benefactor and changed her name by force. The old grandmother in Moscow was not strong enough to join battle with such personages.

General Bostrom's widow spent almost the whole of the summer travelling along the Siberian highway to Irkutsk. Finally she arrived. Rupert ordered Andrei Timofeyev, a Cossack officer, to escort the widow and the girl back to Moscow. Together with money 'for one horse to cover the distance of 10,678.5 versts from Irkutsk to Moscow and back', he also gave Timofeyev detailed instructions on how best to protect the worthy lady and the girl, and also how best to protect law and order: 'While on the road, conduct yourself in a sober and seemly manner, treat the girl and Mrs Bostrom with the utmost respect and give them all necessary assistance. However, you must not permit them to leave the highway, nor to stop anywhere unless it is strictly necessary, such as to rest. On arriving in Moscow, you must not call at any house with the girl Nikitina but go directly to the Institute of St Catherine, and there report to the authorities, hand over the girl Nikitina, and obtain a signed receipt,

¹ People of humble extraction were known only by their Christian name and patronymic, but had no surname.

which is to be brought to me personally on your return to Irkutsk.'

Understandable prudence: scattered throughout Siberia were Decembrists who would have liked to say farewell to the daughter of the unforgettable Nikita Muravyov; 'you must not call at any house'—which meant they could not call at the grandmother's.

The Cossack officer Timofeyev returned in November 1843, and presented the duly stamped document testifying that Sofia Nikitina had been delivered to the proper place in the proper manner: this act of benevolence was performed in a way which corresponded in every detail to an arrest.

It was only many years later, when most of those involved had already passed away, that an account written by the granddaughter of the girl taken west under guard in the summer of 1843 first appeared:

'They arrived at the gallop at Moscow city gates in the evening. With the help of a large sum of money, relatives succeeded in bribing the guard and purchasing the services of the state courier, who agreed to take S. N. to her grandmother's house, where she spent the night with her family. The courier took her back to the gates before dawn, and then the barrier was raised to let through a girl bearing the common name of Sofia Nikitina. That was the name under which grandmother was registered at the St Catherine Institute, where she was taken in the same carriage by the same courier.' It is known that S. N. Muravyova refused to answer to the name of Nikitina. Once, in the presence of the empress, she declared: 'My name is not Nikitina—it is Muravyova.'

Later the daughter of Nikita Muravyov will become the wife of Mikhail Bibikov, the nephew of three Decembrists, one fallen on the battlefield, another executed and the third—exiled, the Muravyov-Apostols. Her house will become a focal point of reminiscences handed down from one generation to the next, preserving the Decembrist past for the future.

Now it remains for us to complete the extraordinary biography of Lunin.

Lunin's Last Days

'A senator travelling around Eastern Siberia was the last man to see Lunin alive. Even here Lunin was true to character, and when the senator called to see him, Lunin assumed the expression of a man of high society and said (in French): 'Allow me to welcome you in my coffin.'

The last Lunin anecdote. Senator Ivan Nikolayevich

Tolstoy, who was known to many of the Decembrists, visited Akatui in March 1845. Prior to his visit he had uncovered serious instances of abuse in the Siberian administration and his report boded ill for Governor Rupert.

It matters little to Lunin.

The last letter written by Lunin (to Sergei Volkonsky).

'My health is amazing. Provided they do not take it into their heads to hang me or shoot me, I am capable of living a hundred years. However, I need herbs and medicine for my poor fellow-prisoners. Send me something for fever, colds and wounds caused by the lash and rods. I will repay the expenses incurred. I have several thousand roubles here with me, but I might as well have nothing at all, so secret is my imprisonment.

'Farewell, my dear friend. If you wish to receive longer and more detailed letters, send me paper and powdered ink. My greetings to all those who remember and understand me. Your devoted Mikhail.'

Perhaps Lunin, now in his late 50s, was trying to keep up his spirits, did not wish to complain... Or could the words 'provided they do not take it into their heads to hang me or shoot me' be more than just a joke?

The official version is as follows: '1845, December 3rd, state criminal Lunin died at 8 o'clock in the morning from an apoplectic fit.'

Rumours:

In the early 1850s, Lunin's sister, Ye. S. Uvarova, talked about her brother to Prince Ivan Gagarin, who was preparing to write Lunin's biography: 'That morning he went hunting, and when he returned he lay down, never to rise again: they closed the damper over the stove too soon, and he was poisoned by the fumes.'

In 1869 a book by Wladyslaw Czaplinski was published in Cracow. Czaplinski who had taken part in the Polish uprising of 1863 and spent several years in Akatui, wrote down the tales told him by Polish exiles, destroyed his manuscript when crossing the border, but then wrote it again from memory. According to Czaplinsky, the secret instruction to kill Lunin came from St Petersburg, directly from the Tsar, and was carried out by an officer called Grigoryev.

'One night, around 2 o'clock in the morning, a considerable commotion began inside the walls of Akatui, that had something menacing about it. For some unexplained reason, all the prisoners, excepting only the seven common criminals, and the whole of the military detachment were, contrary to the customary practice, sent out to work. This was done quickly, and everyone was ordered to move

out in silence, so that all shivered with a presentiment of something dreadful, something savage. When everyone had been led out, Grigoryev and the seven common criminals came up quietly to Lunin's door, Grigoryev opened it quickly and rushed in. Lunin was already in bed, but a candle was burning on a small table by the bed. Lunin was still reading. Grigoryev was the first to run up to Lunin and seize him by the throat. Then the criminals seized him by the arms and legs, pushed the pillow over his face and, pressing their hands down over his throat, began to strangle him. On hearing Lunin's shout and the noise of the struggle, Lunin's chaplain, whom they had apparently forgotten, came running out of another room. He stood in the doorway transfixed and, seeing Grigoryev and the criminals strangling Lunin, wrung his hands in despair, horror-stricken. One of the criminals noticed the chaplain and glanced at Grigoryev—perhaps the chaplain, an unnecessary witness to the crime, should also become its victim? Grigoryev continued to strangle Lunin with one hand while with the other he signalled to the criminal to come and take his place. The criminal rushed up to Lunin, slipped easily into Grigoryev's place and, accustomed to this kind of work, completed the murder within a moment. Having let go of Lunin's throat, Grigoryev, bowing elegantly, went up to the chaplain, apologised to him as if the matter were a mere trifle, a misunderstanding between friends, ... held out his hand and said, with no sign of confusion: "Excuse me, excuse me, this is no concern of yours. This," pointing to the executioners, "is the order of our gracious sovereign. Excuse me," he repeated, and added, "As far as you are concerned, at least, no instructions have been given."

Second Lieutenant Grigoryev did indeed serve in Akatui; it was he who escorted Lunin there.

The papers in the Nerchinsk archives and the medical report are odd in composition and contain numerous mistakes.

Such was the mysterious end of one of the proudest and most indomitable spirits of the 19th century. About this same time the life of one of the gentlest and kindest of people also came to an end, but we shall speak of this elsewhere.

Etherial Footsteps



In the summer of 1837, a party of seven Decembrists was moving under guard from the East to the West, from Asia to Europe. Their route was to take them to 'the other Asia', that is, the Caucasus. (Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin would sometimes address the envelope 'To the Honourable Lev Sergeyevich Pushkin, Esq. in Asia', and the letter easily reached his younger brother who served in the Caucasian army corps).

And thus it was that Nikolai Lorer, former member of the Southern society, arrested as a 32-year-old Major, and now enlisted as 42-year-old private, travelled that summer to the West and South.

Another Decembrist making the journey was Mikhail Naryshkin, three years younger than Lorer, but two ranks senior (many years previously, of course)—a 39-year-old ex-colonel turned private, others journeying to the Caucasus included the 40-year-old Mikhail Nazimov (former staff-captain of the Guards), Cherkasov and Rosen, former lieutenants. Naryshkin's wife and Rosen's wife and children will return home to await their soldier husbands. There was no one to accompany or wait for Vladimir Likharev: in his former life the dashing young 25-year-old second lieutenant had a wife (Yekaterina Borozdina, of whom we have already spoken), in Siberia Likharev had learned of the birth of his son; by now the 37-year-old private had long since known that his wife has married again.

Finally the seventh soldier—Alexander Ivanovich Odoyevsky, a former cavalry lieutenant in the Guards, a former prince of the Riurikovich line¹ (although, can one, on losing the noble title, also cease to be a Riurikovich?).

In the Caucasus, having survived several years of bullets and fever, one may, aged about 40-45, become an officer², retire and leave the Caucasus—not for the capital, of course, but at least for one's own estate to live with one's family—under surveillance.

These seven men (like all the other Decembrists transferred to the Caucasus) were naturally hoping that good fortune would come their way, and in some cases it did. Some of those who remained behind in Siberia were envi-

¹ That is, a descendant of legendary Riurik (9th century), the founder of the most ancient Russian royal dynasty.

² The rank of officer bestowed also the rank of nobility, the right of inheritance and ability to retire from army service.

ous of them. Sergei Volkonsky sought a transfer to the Caucasus through his old friend and brother officer, the influential Count Vorontsov. The Tsar refused. And indeed, a former prince and general in the Napoleonic wars enlisted as a private—that would be too great a temptation for those soldiers who still remembered him, and for many officers.

Volkonsky was not permitted to go to the Caucasus; and neither was another convict of a very different rank and position.

On 27 April 1842, the chief of gendarmes Count Benken-dorf, sent a message to the governor-general of Irkutsk which arrived at the beginning of June: 'The petition which I received from the state criminal Mozalevsky, presently at Petrovsky Zavod, that he be transferred to active service in the Caucasus, has not been granted the assent of His Imperial Majesty.'

We can surmise the reason: the former ensign in the Chernigovsky regiment, who had been sent by Sergei Muravyov-Apostol to raise Kiev in revolt, would, in the Caucasus inevitably meet soldiers who had previously been under his command, for many of those who had served in the old Chernigovsky regiment had been transferred here. That a former officer, armed once more, meet up with his former soldiers, also armed, was a situation which could not be permitted.

Mozalevsky remained in Siberia, where he soon died of sickness and heartache...

It should in all fairness be noted, however, that by no means all the Decembrists requested permission to go on active service and gain promotion. Mikhail Lunin, who regarded the Winter Palace with disdain, even from Eastern Siberia, once wrote the following biting words: 'I hear that some of our political exiles have expressed the desire to serve in the Caucasian army in the hope of making their peace with the government. In my opinion, it is unwise to contemplate such a step without having first subjected oneself to a small test. One should instruct that, on the first day he is to receive fifty strokes of the birch, on the second day—a hundred, on the third day—two hundred, receiving a final total of three hundred and fifty strokes. After such a test one may declare "I am worthy, I am worthy."'

It appears that these ironic words were addressed first and foremost to Alexander Ivanovich (to his friends, Sasha or Sashenka) Odoyevsky. He was transferred to the Caucasus partly as a result of a letter in verse he once wrote to his aged father in which he expressed sorrow and regret.

It began with: 'Swept by a whirlwind from far-off lands I was thrown on the ninth wave...'

It is said that the Tsar and Benkendorf were moved by the letter. Far more important, however, is the fact that the extremely influential General Paskevich was at that same time petitioning on behalf of his relative (this incident will be discussed later in our story).

In actual fact it would have been better for Odoyevsky if he had not gone to the Caucasus. (Oh, this knowledge of the outcome, of what is going to happen! Sometimes it burdens the historian, who dreams each time of being, if not the one to create at least the first to discover what has happened.)

But it was not to die from Caucasian bullets or fever that Alexander Odoyevsky came into the world (nor, yet, however, to languish in Siberia).

On the 13 and 14 December 1825, during the uprising in St Petersburg, he exclaimed 'We will die. Oh, how splendidly we will die!'—and this exclamation became famous, was recorded in official documents, provoking admiration, anger, sympathy.

Indeed, they did die 'splendidly'. The young prince prophesied not only his own fate, but that of many others: he himself lived on, but he had already uttered his prophetic words for himself: 'Mene, mene, tekeli, upharsin'.

The prophetic power of a poet!

Odoyevsky is a poet—this is a second reason for particular concern regarding Sasha. Nor is he just any poet—he is the first bard of penal servitude.

In the memoirs of various Decembrists one can sense a jealous partiality for Odoyevsky: Pushkin, Griboyedov, Lermontov may be more talented, but they were not on Senate Square, not in Siberia, and can they understand?

The 35-year-old poet, Odoyevsky... His celebrated, proud Reply to Pushkin's message *To Siberia* was written ten years previously or, more accurately, written down and learned by heart by his companions.

*Of powerful and prophetic words
We heard the mighty strains,
Our eager hands reached for the sword,
But now are weighed with chains.*

*Yet, rest assured, oh bard, our fate,
Our chains we bear with pride,
And here, behind the prison walls,*

*The might of kings deride.
Tis not in vain we labour here,
The spark will light a flame:
A torch to guide our people forth
In freedom's holy name.*

*Swords will we forge out of our chains,
And liberty restore.
Tyrants will tremble on their thrones,
The people breathe once more.¹*

Very few pages of verse written in the hand of Alexander Ivanovich himself have come down to us: he was not accustomed to write—and for what purpose? Once, while in penal servitude, he read a whole course of lectures on Russian literature from his notes, but then it was discovered that the pages had not a word written on them.

En route to the Caucasus, a flock of cranes fly overhead. Odoyevsky immediately begins to compose—and Rosen writes— down— the— verse.

*Rush you, O winged skeins, to lands where laurel trees
On hilltops skyward rear and, stirring, moan and sigh?
Rush you where eagles soar and glide in ecstasy
And then are swallowed by the flaming, azure sky?
We too are southward bound—we go where nature builds
Its arbours of bright blooms and where the heavens blaze
And sparkle ruby-like... Alas! Those warming rays
Will never thaw our hearts, nor will our brows be crowned
With fresh and ever fragrant myrtle sprays...
Life's end looms very close, so fate wills, it is time—
And yet why welcome death, now that the storms have passed
When a dark cypress tree will guard our lonely graves
And not the northland's proud and melancholy pine!
Why crave oblivion when there will be no snow
To shelter our remains, when blood-gorged jackals will
Drag them across a plain to some far-off ravine
And scatter them beneath a sun baked, stony hill!²*

Once more 'we will die', but now not for glory, but for the jackal!

As was mentioned earlier, Alexander Ivanovich apparently did not know the Russian alphabet. Perhaps he chanced upon his unusual words and combinations thanks to—how shall we put it?—his insufficient knowledge of the language? No, surely thanks to the continuing fascination

¹ Tr. by Irina Zheleznova.

² Tr. by Irina Zheleznova.

of his native language.

Odoyevsky is a poet, with all the fluctuations, the moments of exaltation and of depression typical of the artist, with a character so difficult to define that specialists, who see their task as being precisely one of definition, frequently argue and are frequently disappointed.

On Senate Square in December 1825, Prince Odoyevsky did, indeed, present the image of a 'mad conspirator' (the words of Nicholas I)—but not long afterwards, during the investigation, he repented and fell into such a state of depression that the authorities believed him to be 'mentally disturbed'.

In verse addressed to Pushkin and written a year and a half or two years later, the poet is once more dreaming of that freedom at which 'tyrants will tremble on their thrones, the people breathe once more'.

A few years later, and hints of regret creep into his letters to his father.

Nonetheless, his numerous friends, who are not given to such changes of mood, continue to hold him in tender affection.

Here are some of the epithets and descriptions of various friends, interlocutors and contemporaries.

'Odoyevsky is a man of angelic kindness. A poet and scholar; he knows almost all the main European languages... Despite his wealth, he is always in need, for he shares out everything he has.'

'Always carefree, always content and cheerful ... he bore his fate with a light heart; a pleasant conversationalist, he compelled others to laugh a great deal.'

'His voice was so sincere and melodious that it was a delight to listen to him.'

'He was gifted with a peculiar ability to love his neighbour.'

'His love for others was quite unselfish.'

'A Christian without hypocrisy who loved suffering.'

'It is possible that he loved his suffering in the Christian sense of this expression, out of dedication to the common cause.'

Finally, here is what his cousin and friend, the famous playwright Griboyedov, had to say to another close friend in a letter written a month before 14 December: 'I commend him to your friendship as if he were myself. You remember me as I was before my departure for Persia—he is exactly the same, but with numerous other splendid qualities which I have never possessed.'

Griboyedov, the celebrated writer who, according to Pushkin, had 'a melancholic nature and a malicious mind',

is the author of these words...

Several years later Griboyedov makes his last appeal on Sasha's behalf. Then Russian ambassador in Teheran, he writes from Iran, 57 days before his death, to his superior, relative and 'benefactor', General Paskevich. Having concluded the official part of the letter, he adds: 'Now to the most important matter. Without lengthy preliminaries, I simply throw myself at the feet of one whose goodness to me has been boundless, and had I been with you, I would indeed do so, and cover your hands with my tears... Grant me your aid, help the unfortunate Alexander Odoyevsky! Think of the high position to which the Almighty has raised you. You have, of course, deserved this position, but who gave you the abilities which enabled you to merit it? They were given you by He for whom the salvation of one unfortunate wretch from destruction is of far greater importance than the roar of victories, assaults and all our human affairs...

'Could the Tsar refuse you his pardon for your wife's cousin, when the 20-year-old criminal has long since borne more than sufficient suffering for his guilt...

'Do this single act of charity, and God will reward you with His eternal mercy and protection.

'Count Ivan Fedorovich, do not ignore these lines. Rescue a suffering man!'

Here the author of the most celebrated Russian comedy *The Misfortune of Being Clever* has called upon all his spiritual force and literary genius. The 26-year-old Odoyevsky is described as 20 years of age not by accident, nor to deceive, but because it is as a 20-year-old youth that Griboyedov remembers him. Most important of all is Griboyedov's fearful premonition that, if Sasha is not released, he will perish.

The heightened feelings of one poet, on the eve of his own death, are here expressed in relation to another poet whom he cherishes.

Griboyedov opens the list of remarkable people captivated by Alexander Odoyevsky. They valued him not as a poet (they appreciated his poetic gift, yet they themselves were better poets than he), but as a man, for his character.

Griboyedov is the first. Let us remember this.

However, Alexander Sergeyevich Griboyedov did not live to see the other Alexander—he crossed to Caucasus to die (in Persia), while Odoyevsky found himself (in his own words) 'under a granite sky, in the burrows of penal servitude'.

Griboyedov's death in Teheran, at the hands of a fanatical mob, was lamented by Odoyevsky in penal servitude in Chita, and the opening lines of his verse, once read, are

unforgettable:

*Where is he, where is my friend? Whom should I ask?
Where is his soul? Where is his grave?—In a distant land.*

Only after a delay of nine years did Paskevich finally respond, reluctantly, to Griboyedov's appeal. Sasha was sent, at last, to a part of the world not far from the place where, years earlier, Griboyedov perished.

He should not have gone—but how could he not go? The spectre of freedom and the possibility of seeing his father.

Those who, in 1826, were taken to Siberia to serve long sentences of penal servitude could still hope to see again their wives, their children, their brothers and sisters—but not their parents. The old Mrs Bestuzhev waited twenty years for her sons, but did not live to see them.

Having lost one son in the southern uprising, another on the scaffold, Senator Muravyov-Apostol did not live to witness the return of his third son.

Having learned of the death of her favourite son, Nikita, in distant Siberia, Yekaterina Fedorovna Muravyova was unable to add to her life the few extra years that would have enabled her to see once more her other son, Alexander. The ageing Pushchins, Ivashevs and Belyayevs went to the grave without another glimpse of their disgraced children.

However, in the summer of 1837, the year in which our account of Odoyevsky begins, the 68-year-old retired Major-General, Ivan Sergeyevich Odoyevsky, was on his way to see his son.

Tragic meetings at the intersection of ancient roads, with little hope of ever seeing each other again.

Alexander Odoyevsky was on his way to see his father.

In Kazan they spent a few days together; the general and the private were also granted permission to travel several stages south together. Such was their meeting after 17 years apart.

It was, of course, their last meeting.

The old general took a liking to all his son's companions; a few weeks later he wrote to one of them: 'Are you all serving ... in one batallion? And send me your address—in a word, I would be obliged if you would keep me informed of all that has happened to you since the day we parted, the day that was, for me, so terrible.'

They said farewell to Odoyevsky senior, and travelled south across ten black-soil provinces (no more Siberia) towards the Caucasian heat of 1837.

The blood-gorged jackals ...

1837: It is six months since the great poet, Pushkin, was killed.

The writer and Decembrist, Alexander Bestuzhev, was killed two months ago near the Adler promontory on the Black Sea.

It is a little to the north of Adler—in Sochi (now a famous sea-side resort)—that Odoyevsky's destiny lies.

By this time there are almost no Decembrists remaining in the Caucasus (excluding those who are retired and undergoing medical treatment).

The Two Levies

In late 1825 and early 1826, 589 people were arrested and questioned. Of these, ten were informers who could only carry out their assignments by playing the role of conspirator.

That leaves 579.

Half of these (286) were released, but their names were nonetheless put on the secret file. As for those found guilty, 121 were tried, and the majority sentenced to penal servitude in Siberia. Only a few were sent to serve in distant garrisons and in the Caucasus.

165 were found guilty to a minor degree, and these were not put on trial, but dealt with by administrative measures. From this group, quite a few were sent to the Caucasus: some as privates (Berstel, Kozhevnikov, Mikhail Pushchin, Konovnitsyn, Bestuzhev), others with their army rank but transferred from the St Petersburg Guards to the battle-front to fight the Persians and the Turks (Burtsov, Volkovsky). If we also add the soldiers of the Moscow, Chernigovsky and other rebel regiments, we discover a whole gallery of notable Russians who, in 1826, went South not of their own will. These are the Caucasian Decembrists whom Pushkin met on his way to Turkey, and Griboyedov—on his way to Persia.

Many of those involved in the Decembrist conspiracy played a major role in the two difficult campaigns, against Persia in 1826-1828 and against Turkey in 1828-1829, giving valuable advice or correcting the miscalculations of Paskevich (a fact for which the commander-in-chief held them in little affection).

What happened to the 'first levy' of Caucasian Decembrists?

15 died of wounds or illness, more than 50 returned home (many under surveillance).

One way or another, by the mid-1830s, only a few remained in the Caucasus, serving out their time in various Caucasian regiments and administrative departments.

Meanwhile, the times had changed: the 1820s ended, the

1830s were drawing to a close, 10-15 years is a long time, particularly when counted in the extended weeks and months of exile, suffering and vain expectations.

The period 1826-1829 was only the beginning of the reign of Nicholas I; Pushkin was still optimistic, composing verses about a tsar who 'revived Russia with war, and hope, and effort'.

The wars in the Caucasus during the early years of Nicholas' reign were popular even among the Decembrists, for they were seen as wars waged to defend Georgians, Armenians and Greeks against Turks and Persians.

Labour seemed to have had a purpose. Belief in a brighter future, imminent reforms and an amnesty for everyone, in the Caucasus and in Siberia, had still not faded.

By the end of the 1830s, however, almost all hope had disappeared. The style and policy of the Tsar could already be clearly detected.

In 1826-1829 one could say that 'the whole of Russia' was marching to the Caucasus—exiles and volunteers together. Alexei Bestuzhev went alongside Pushkin, Mikhail Pushchin alongside Griboyedov. Those who spent several years in Georgia and Armenia, fighting in the campaigns at Tavriz and Arzrum, did not lose touch with the mainstream of Russian life. Indeed, on the contrary: in those years the Caucasus was one of the cultural and intellectual centres of the country.

Now, however, as the 1840s were approaching, history suddenly arranged a harsh experiment in this part of the world, a truly amazing confrontation of Russian epoch and generations.

'Ave, imperator, morituri te salutant'—'Hail, Emperor, those who are about to die salute you!'

Here is yet another of the semi-legendary stories about Odoyevsky, in the style of 'Oh, how splendidly we will die!'

In the autumn of 1837, just as several of the Decembrists were completing their journey of many weeks from Siberia, the arrival of the Tsar in the Caucasus was causing feverish excitement.

Abuses were discovered, the governor was humiliated, one aide-de-camp was dishonourably discharged—everyone was expecting the worst, and at that very moment a new batch of state criminals arrived coming almost alongside the imperial cortege.

'As luck would have it,' one eyewitness recalled, 'the Emperor was due to arrive that very night in Stavropol. It was a dark autumn night, the rain poured down, and although lampions had been lit along the road, they spluttered and died under the torrential downpour, giving off

more stench than light.

'At last, around midnight, the state courier arrived and a distant "Hurrah!" could be heard. We went out onto the balcony; some way off, surrounded by burning torches, a dark mass was moving.

'There was indeed something sombre about this scene.

"Good God!" exclaimed Odoyevsky. "Look, it resembles a funeral! Oh, if only we had arrived in time!..." And, draining his glass in one mouthful, he cried out in Latin "Ave, imperator..."

"Have you gone mad?" we all said, dragging him back into the room. "What are you doing! You might be heard, and that would mean disaster!"

"Here in Russia the police have not yet learned Latin," he answered, laughing good-heartedly.

Those condemned to die salute you. May you perish!

The much-trumpeted arrival of Nicholas I in the Caucasus coincided with the amazing unheralded appearance of those remarkable poets haunting the Caucasus of 1837.

Lermontov—only recently exiled here for his poem commemorating Pushkin, *On the Death of the Poet*.

Alexander Chavchavadze—just returned to his native land from exile in St Petersburg.

Nikolai Ogaryov, later to become famous as the colleague of Herzen, has arrived here from exile in Penza to take the waters and visit friends.

Nikoloz Baratashvili, the beloved bard of Georgia, is living out the 20th of the 27 years fate has allotted to him.

Alexander Odoyevsky...

That they should meet is inevitable—but this is only a part of the historical experiment we are discussing.

'More than once Nazimov, a Decembrist and a great admirer of Lermontov, asked the poet to explain to him modern youth and its opinions, but Lermontov, mocking and parodying drawing-room heroes, affirmed that "we have no opinions, we simply gather together, carouse, pursue our careers and flirt with the women", pretending to brag of his vices and thereby angering Nazimov. On more than one occasion Glebov had to calm the infuriated Decembrist, while Lermontov, seizing his cap and laughing loudly, ran out of the room onto the boulevard for one of the solitary walks of which he was so fond' (the account given by a contemporary and eye-witness, Prince Vasilchikov).

Many years later, Nazimov, by now aged 80, told a biographer of Lermontov: 'At the beginning, Lermontov often

called to see us and was happy to talk with us at length on various issues of private, social and political significance. I confess that we did not understand each other very well. It is impossible now, forty years later, to describe our conversations. However, we were surprised at the strange inconsistency and lack of clarity in his ideas. At times he appeared to be a pragmatist with his two feet firmly planted on the ground, lacking any imagination, whereas in poetry he soared upwards on mighty wings. He mocked certain government decrees with which we were deeply sympathetic and which we had dreamed of in our unhappy youth. Magazine articles, particularly of a critical tone, which appeared to be a legacy of the best minds in Europe, which cut us to the quick and aroused our admiration for the fact that it was possible to write such things in Russia, left him unmoved. Questioned directly, he either gave no reply, or else avoided the issue with a sarcastic joke. The more we saw each other, the more difficulty we had in engaging in a serious discussion. Nonetheless, there burned in him a spark of original thought—and, moreover, he was still but a youth!

The Decembrist Nikolai Lorer: 'I took a dislike to Lermontov from the very beginning of our acquaintance. I was always happy to meet warm and friendly people able to preserve through all the phases of their life a benevolent warmth of heart, a lively affection for all that is noble and beautiful, but when I spoke with Lermontov he appeared cold, jaundiced, irritable, a misanthropist filled with an aversion towards mankind as a whole, and I must have appeared to him to be a good-natured fool if he noticed my inner calm and disregard for all the evils I had suffered at the hands of the government. To this day I cannot explain why it was I did not feel comfortable with him, and our parting was polite but cold.'

We have recalled but a few of many such episodes.

Here they are, the 40-year-old privates in the Caucasian army corps who, half a lifetime ago, were colonels, majors, lieutenants in the Guards, and who, were it not for the 14 December, would by now doubtless have become generals in command of those who now commanded them.

These are the Decembrists of the second levy, as distinct from the first levy, which had departed from the scene several years earlier.

The first, as has already been mentioned, had been found guilty only to a minor degree...

The second, on the other hand, were state criminals once condemned to penal servitude in the snows of Siberia.

They had spent about 15 years in fortified prisons, and then 'at the bottom of the bag' (which was now one of Nicholas' ministers described Eastern Siberia). They had lived many years in regions so remote that letters from relatives travelled for months, and the quickest royal courier took 30 to 40 days to make the journey.

They were so far away from their homes, from the capitals, from their customary way of life, from cultured society, that over 15 years they might—shall we say?— have fallen behind their contemporaries?

No, not at all!

In the next century, science-fiction writers will often bring an expedition to outer space back to earth, where time has passed at a rate different from that indicated by the clock aboard the spaceship, and where everything has changed to such an extent that those who return are unable to recognise anyone or anything...

Be that as it may, something of the kind happened to the Decembrists of the second levy who, after an interval of many years, met their fondly-remembered contemporaries in the Caucasus—and seemed not to recognise them.

'Glebov had to calm the infuriated Decembrist while Lermontov, seizing his cap and laughing loudly, ran out of the room...'

'Magazine articles ... which aroused our admiration ... left him unmoved.'

'A misanthropist ... and good-natured fools.'

How simple it is to explain, and how often it is explained by saying that the newly-arrived Decembrists were filled with various illusions, while the great poet Lermontov was not; that they believed in that 'which it was a mistake to believe in', while Lermontov 'did not believe, and was right'.

How simple...

It should, however, be remembered that it was only many years later that the Decembrists told about the debates that had taken place in the Caucasus between 1837 and 1841. By then Lermontov's posthumous reputation was already established: a few pages further on in his memoirs, Lorer wrote of the 'wonderful poet who might, to some extent, have taken the place of the departed Pushkin'. Together with his account of his disagreement with Lermontov, Nazimov tells us that 'in his sarcastic comments there was a note of grief and indignation at the triviality of contemporary high society, and fear at the thought that this triviality must inevitably influence other strata of the population.' How easy it would have been for the elderly Decembrists to smooth over and retrospectively

improve their relations with the illustrious poet.

However, they did not—and should we do it for them?

And if we should not—then we will express our belief that the Caucasian debate brought together not only liberalism and negation (it did, of course, but this is not the most important thing!). It also brought together generations, historically differing ways of thought.

Exiled in the Siberian wastes, the Decembrists, 40-year-old youths, had remained almost the same as they had been when they were stripped of rank and condemned at the age of 25. 'Almost the same', is not, of course, to be taken too literally: physically they had not retained their youth, and some did not live to see the 1840s.

However, in spirit they were the same as they had been in the 1820s. Perhaps this was their response to exile. Pushkin, the great poet of their generation, wrote:

*We shall lose our youthful spirit
Only with our precious life.*

They retained their youthful spirit—while time itself was ageing.

And here in the Caucasus they met Lermontov, another poet in disgrace, exiled, and still a young man. How could they not greet him as one of their own, their son; how could they not embrace him, console him, and be consoled?

However, they come up against a man who is prickly, armoured.

From various reminiscences, those just cited and others, one gains the impression that their first meetings and conversations with the author of *Death of the Poet* provoked in many of the old Decembrists a feeling of irritation and offense. Some retreated, having failed to penetrate the armour.

They, who are older, reason with him along the lines of Pushkin's 'Dear friend, have faith' or 'Hail, Muses! Hail, Reason!'

They search the journals for fresh, living words (and find, incidentally, those of Lermontov). They are excited by rumours, by vague reports that the serfs are being emancipated, or are going to be, yet Lermontov retorts—one can easily imagine his sarcastic smile, his gestures of cynicism... We cannot hear his actual response, but we are familiar with lines which even their Pushkin could not have written—could not because he did not suspect the possibility of such an era, of such sentiments:

*With deep distress I contemplate our generation,
Its future stretches on to darkness, emptiness,
Knowing too much, lost in equivocation,
It grows towards old age in idleness.*

Further on comes a description no less dreadful—'poor fruit, too early come to ripeness', 'passions which our sceptic minds deride'.

Lermontov's poem *Meditation* is a kind of dialogue with an invisible companion; a comparison, as it were, between the people of the present and those of the past, for whom the situation was just the opposite:

*Great works of art and high, poetic dreaming
Wake in our minds no sweet responsive thrill...*

In these lines we can feel the invisible presence of the people of the 1820s who were able to respond to the sweet pleasure of poetry and art.

As the poem progresses, almost every line reflects the 'bright shadow' of a totally different kind of people:

*Great works of art and high, poetic dreaming
Wake in our minds no sweet responsive thrill.
And avidly we hoard the dregs of feeling,
A miser's wasted talent—buried still.
And casual all alike our loves and hatreds,
We make no sacrifice to love or ire.
The coldness in our souls holds nothing sacred,
Yet in our blood seethes fire.*

And now comes the direct comparison of the younger generation, old in spirit, and the older generation, still young in spirit—but Lermontov reveals no sense of respectful affection for those who have gone before:

*Bored by our ancestors' delights uproarious,
Their conscientious, childish revelry,
We, hastening joyless on to graves inglorious,
Look back in irony.*

'Look back in irony'—this was what offended and infuriated those who were not inclined to deride the events of the past.

The last verse, however, and the most hopeless, also contains something, at least, about which the 40-year-old soldiers and the 25-year-old cornet¹ can agree:

¹ A junior officer's rank in cavalry.

*A sullen multitude not long remembered,
We'll flit earth's face and leave no mark,
No seed of fruitful thought have we engendered,
No work of genius, no living spark
To light the ages for our heirs and citizens to come...
Who will dismiss us with a scornful epitaph
As, seeing his heritage despoiled, a son
Writes off his bankrupt father—with a laugh.*¹

'Fruitful thought', 'leaving their mark', 'work of genius' 'living spark', 'our heirs and citizens'—these words are indicative of those days when young people were, indeed, more youthful, when they defeated Napoleon and marched out onto Senate Square, the days of Pushkin and Griboyedov, when Lunin amused himself and Ryleyev gave his life.

But—'we ... look back in irony', and now there remains untouched by scorn only the future, that descendant who will not resemble his parents. Perhaps (as is often the case) he will be closer to his grandparents? Yet they were uproarious, childish.

In the story *The Fatalist* by Lermontov we find the following: 'We pass indifferently from one doubt to another, just as our forebears floundered from one delusion to another.'²

Thus the men of the 1820s lose their youthfulness 'only with life itself', while the generation of the 1830s and 1840s 'grows towards old age in idleness'.

'The men of the 1820s,' noted the Soviet writer and historian, Tynyanov, 'died a painful death, because their era died before them.'

Given this situation, the conflict between these two noble-minded generations who met in Lermontov's Caucasus, was inevitable. Moreover, to speak frankly, without this conflict the Russia of the period would appear somewhat monotonous, even uninteresting and, most importantly, unreal. Positive heroes, good people, have often clashed with each other, bitterly and with good reason. At the time our noble Decembrists were less than flattering in their comments on the celebrated poet; then one of the older generation, Rufin Dorokhov, was ready to take up his pistol in response to Lermontov's remarks.

'Lermontov was one of those who, on the first meeting, not only fail to dispose others towards them, but even

¹ M. Y. Lermontov, 'Meditation', tr. by Avril Pyman, in Mikhail Lermontov, *Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, pp. 34-35.

² M. Y. Lermontov, 'A Hero of Our Time', tr. by Martin Parker, *Ibid.*, p. 296.

provoke quite a degree of prejudice against themselves. There were many reasons why I, too, felt little sympathy towards him to start with... His cold attitude appeared to me to be arrogance, while his connections with high-ranking officials and with all those who frequented army headquarters all but forced me to view him as an upstart from the capital. What is more, I found even his face unpleasant—subsequently Lermontov himself would sometimes laugh over it and say that fate, as if for a joke, had given him that typical army look. One evening at a dinner party we almost had a serious quarrel.

'Little by little the unpleasant impression he had created on me began to fade... We finally became friends thanks to an incident that occurred once when we were out on an expedition together. Tartars¹ almost slaughtered the two of us, and only an unexpected rescue party saved us. Out on an expedition Lermontov was quite a different man from the one he appeared to be at headquarters or a spa, when he was bored and inactive.'

Those among the 'old men' who were not put off by the prickles and were able to penetrate Lermontov's armour discovered the extraordinary Lermontov and found themselves in a marvellous and unusual world. However, the Decembrists, these 'messengers from the past', needed to have a special talent to find a common language with their brilliant contemporary.

Alexander Odoyevsky proved to have just such a talent.

In October 1837, he, together with Lermontov, left Stavropol for Tiflis, where both were to serve in the Nizhegorodsky regiment of dragoons.

Cornet Mikhail Lermontov, dismissed from the Guards.

Private Alexander Odoyevsky, state criminal, formerly a cornet in the Guards.

By the time Odoyevsky and Lermontov set out to cross the Caucasian mountains, Lermontov had already been pardoned: on his way back from the Caucasus, the Tsar had finally been persuaded that several months in the guard-house, followed by exile, was punishment enough for writing *Death of the Poet*.

However, news of the pardon moves slowly along the chain of clerks and offices between St Petersburg and Georgia.

Strictly speaking, the whole history of the friendship between the two poets is confined to the period of the bureaucratic circulation of one document. When that docu-

¹ At that time, they called all Moslems in the Caucasus Tartars. Actually, there were no real Tartars in the Caucasus.

ment arrives, they will part for ever.

One month. Then they part forever.

Alexander Odoyevsky was born in November 1802, and Mikhail Lermontov in October 1814. On the day the prince-cornet exclaimed 'Oh, how splendidly we will die!' Lermontov was about the same age as Odoyevsky had been when Lermontov was born: in the winter of 1825, under the tender care of his grandmother on her estate, he was 'wearing a green jacket and, during the thaw, was making gigantic human figures out of the snow' (from the reminiscences of his cousin).

Odoyevsky belongs to the older generation, Lermontov to the younger.

'Oh, how splendidly we will die!' is a cry from that other world: the age of Lermontov avoids sentimental exclamations, and is not inclined to enthuse, even over its own death; if such emotions are felt, they are concealed from relatives and friends.

A meeting of two generations—and represented by two such people!

Recollections of this meeting have been written.

In Memory of A.I.O.

Two years go by after those months in the Caucasus. The censor passes the twelfth issue of the major Russian literary journal *Otechestvennyye Zapiski*—on 14 December 1839, a Decembrist anniversary. 'There are strange coincidences', as Pushkin would have said. If we leaf through the voluminous edition of this illustrious journal we find ourselves in a distant world which cannot fail to amaze us, even if we have heard a great deal about it.

During the previous 150 years much had changed in the publishing world: both the protagonists and the size of the editions. However, there is one difference that we would like to point to immediately. If one looks carefully at the stories, articles and standard verse of the time, bordering, so to speak, on the average and lower than average literary level (unavoidable even in the best publications), then one notices that in the first half of the 19th century the most celebrated journals published not a little of what is often referred to as cheap fare, particularly in translation. Today it is often difficult to read it without smiling: the minimum editorial requirements have undoubtedly improved over the course of several generations, and the average literary work of today is of better quality, more professional.

The average literary work, that is. There is no longer

the sharp dividing line between good and bad material which existed previously (we will not speak here of outstanding material as this does not lend itself to such calculations).

In the twelfth issue of *Zapiski* we suddenly find, alongside mediocre stories and verse, poetry previously unknown to the Russian reader (although the Russian reader of today would find it strange to think that once these lines had not been written; they are learned by heart at every school):

*Chained by rock, thee wildly leaping,
Maddened Terek waxes fierce,
Like a storm he howls, and weeping
Sprays the cliff with angry tears.*¹

Two hundred pages later there is another poem, also signed by M. Lermontov. Entitled *In Memory of A.I.O.*

It was not difficult to guess the identity of A.I.O., and all those who were sufficiently interested guessed correctly. Here lay the boldness of the author. A few months earlier the head of the secret police, Mordvinov, had been sacked for letting through a portrait of the writer and Decembrist Alexander Bestuzhev (Marlinsky) in the anthology *100 Russian Authors*. It was strictly forbidden to mention, or remember such people.

And now—*In Memory of A.I.O.*

But then, in that winter of 1839-1840, Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov took considerable risks with fate.

On the Tsar's birthday, 6 December, Lermontov was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, but it was precisely at that time that the 'club of 16'—a group of 16 young men, of which one of the leaders was Lermontov—used to hold its meetings. 'Each night, on returning from the theatre or a ball, they would gather at the house of one or another of the members. There, after a light supper, they would smoke their cigars and talk to each other about the events of the day, gossiping about everything and discussing everything absolutely freely, as if the 3rd Department of His Imperial Majesty's own office² did not exist: this was the measure of their confidence in the discretion of all the members of the society' (reminiscences of Count K. Branitsky, a member of the club).

Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich, the Tsar's brother (and

¹ M.Y. Lermontov, 'Gifts of the Terek', tr. by Irina Zheleznova, in *Russian 19th Verse*, Raduga Publishers, 1983, p. 129.

² The department of political surveillance and investigation at the head of the Gendarme Corps.—Ed.

one of Lermontov's most high-ranking superiors), knew a little, guessed a lot more and threatened 'to destroy that nest' (i.e. to put an end to Hussar liberty and impudence).

Towards the end of 1839, de Barante, the son of the French ambassador, enquired: 'Is it true that, in a famous stanza in his poem *Death of the Poet*, Lermontov inveighs against Frenchmen in general, or only against the man who killed Pushkin?' The situation is moving towards a duel, and it is the duel that will (officially) be the reason for his second exile.

Officially. In fact, however, it is just about this time (as Irakli Andronikov has shown) that the poet-lieutenant, already suspect for his political views, succeeds in turning the Tsar himself into his personal enemy: the club of 16 saves a well-born young lady from the amorous pursuit of the monarch—she is quickly given in marriage just the day before she is to be made a maid of honour and the Tsar's mistress. The personal enmity of the Tsar (the cause of his well-known comment made later in reference to the poet—'a cur's death for a cur') is far worse than persecution merely for one's views on society!

And now, just prior to all of this, comes *In Memory of A.I.O.* We slowly read the 65 marvellous lines of recollection, a poem as celebrated as it is enigmatic.

*I knew him well: together wandered we
The East's far hills, together shared the anguish
And pain of exile; but my native lea
I saw again and could for ever banish
Of trials past the cruel memory.
But he—he never knew that dulcet moment,
For illness struck him down...¹*

The melancholy of exile: on his return, Lermontov will speak of 'warm and alien lands'.

Odoevsky survived less than two years after he and Lermontov parted: he was first in Tiflis, then in Stavropol. In the summer of 1839 he found himself on the unhealthy, sun-baked coast of the Black Sea at Subashi, near Sochi. We still possess some accounts of this period by eyewitnesses (or those who inquired of them); and these accounts, as with any bad news, travelled quickly across the Caucasus, across Russia, and finally reached the capital—and Lermontov.

It was said that Odoevsky was always cheerful, always

¹ Tr. by Irina Zheleznova. Further on, all Lermontov's verse is given in her translation (unless otherwise indicated), Pushkin's—translated by Peter Tempest.

smiling; that he was tired; that he had been deeply shaken by the news of his father's death and the added grief of recollecting their last farewell on the road near Kazan.

From the recollections and letters of his friends it is clear that Alexander Ivanovich had lost the will to live—he was tired, but he still smiled.

Therefore, when it was suggested that all who wished should take the boat sailing for another section of the Caucasian line, private Odoyevsky refused outright, remarking casually: 'We will stay here and become victims of fever.' When he fell ill, he constantly made fun of the inexperienced doctor.

'Odoyevsky ascribed his illness to the fact that, the evening before, he had been reading Schiller while sitting in a draught coming through the raised flaps of his tent.'

'In a worn army tent'—Lermontov knows every detail.

The death of the ailing Odoyevsky was nonetheless so unexpected that for some time after he passed away those present had the impression (despite all the indications) that he was alive just the same and would come round at any moment.

Contemporaries reported that 'a large wooden cross was erected on the grave. After one of the attacks by the mountain tribes, the cross disappeared. It was said that they destroyed Russian graves. Legend has it, however, that among the mountain tribes there was a fugitive Russian officer who was able to explain to them who was buried there, and the corpse of the unhappy man was given a second burial.' The legend is as attractive as it is improbable: it is the last legend surrounding the name of Sasha Odoyevsky, valuable not for its accuracy, but for what it reveals in the attitude towards this man and memories of him. Those who knew him, loved him, attempted to improve his fate, if only posthumously, to create in their imagination a higher justice.

As for Lermontov, he and Odoyevsky had travelled together in the autumn of 1837: they had shared the grief of exile and talked, talked a great deal—and we have the right to listen once again to voices long since silent. Though it is always dangerous to invent, to add, to translate poetry into the language of memoirs, we believe that, with due caution, it is both possible and necessary.

...he died in torment

In a worn army tent, and off with him

To his lone grave bore hosts of dreams that, dim,

By inspiration's wavering flame were lit,

And blighted hope, and bitter, vain regret...

Lermontov had still not written his most important works, and neither of the poets knew (though they may have vaguely anticipated) what their fate, as men and as writers, would be. Odoyevsky read poetry (which he did easily and eagerly), whereas Lermontov apparently had no particular liking for his verse—'dim dreams', 'inspiration's wavering flame' (in a rough copy of the poem which has survived we come across the expression 'bewitching host' and 'troubled swarm of inspirations, vague and cloudy'). Incidentally, about the same time he said of himself 'my still unrealised genius'. In general, Lermontov's view of poetry and its social role was very different, more sceptical: he was well aware that sometimes a verse 'rang out like a clarion call' but not 'in our tame age'.

Different poets, different people, different epochs.

For all that, however, Lermontov felt a close kinship with Odoyevsky; all that found expression in Odoyevsky's tales, verse and his smile, his personality, moved and amazed Lermontov.

'Deceived hopes and bitter regrets'—what does this refer to? To a life that has proved a failure? To the dream unrealised, even of dying splendidly, for a purpose.

Lermontov could not, did not wish to believe in higher powers, the supreme principle, as firmly as did his companion, but in the poem *Sashka* (written about the same time as *In Memory of A.I.O.*), he summoned the spirit of the dead man, expressing the sorrow for his friend, and prophecy about himself:

*Peace to your bones, dear comrade! They will rot
Together with your uniform. Your fate
Is this dark shelter where you lie forgot,
A sentry left for all time at the gate.
And yet—who knows!—do not lose hope, friend, wait—
The earth is fond of youth and its embraces—
Some of your erstwhile brothers may yet come
And join you here... What crown is this that graces
Your brow? Where have you flown? Have you become
Estranged from those you left behind you, singer,
Or does love for us in your heart still linger?..*

Believe in hope: that's the theme of the second stanza of *In Memory of A.I.O.*:

*Born had he been for hope and poetry
And happiness, but, madman, far too early
Cast off the clothes of childhood, boldly hurling
His heart into life's seething, roaring sea.
The world no mercy showed him, nor was he*

*By Heaven saved, alas!.. But honest feeling
Flamed in his heart, and e'en in desert lone
He was himself: his childish laugh rang freely,
His speech was lively, and his blue eyes shone;
He never lost, though knew he pain and strife,
His faith in man and in a better life.*

It would be interesting to ask a reader who does not know who is the author and about whom he is writing to stop at this point, and then to ask him the age of the writer and his hero.

Clearly, the author is the older of the two!

The key notion 'child-like' has occurred twice:

*'Cast off the clothes of childhood...'
'His childish laugh...'*

And in the rough copy it occurs still more frequently:

The child-like laughter of a man, his child-like mind and heart...

This— theme— is— of— crucial— importance.

With every line, with every epithet, we can almost hear Lermontov asserting: 'With me, it's just the opposite.' Odoyevsky's 'gentle flame of feeling', and Lermontov's 'word born of fire and light'.

The gleam of azure eyes, the proud belief in men and a better world; yet in Lermontov's *Meditation* we have just read: 'And casual all alike our loves and hatreds...'

It is not by chance that Lermontov's poetry contains so many references—a surprising number in the most diverse compositions—to children, children's laughter, and their wonderful world he has left behind, and he is envious of those who have managed to preserve even a little of their childhood.

*'I was Evil, yes, and Good that in me fought,
But to retain the voice of God I sought...*

It is as if Lermontov was about to echo Griboyedov and assert that Sasha Odoyevsky was 'as I once was' except that Griboyedov was 7 years older than Odoyevsky, while Lermontov was 12 years younger.

The Decembrist Lorer made a most significant error: 'A. I. Odoyevsky was approaching 37 years of age when he died. Pushkin was 37, Griboyedov was 37 and Lermontov was 37...'¹

¹ Actually, 27; killed in a duel in the Caucasus in his second exile in 1841.—Ed.

'And you believe,' said Chaadayev, 'there are still young people today?' (Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*).

Around this time Lunin's sister wrote to her exiled brother: 'The sickness of our age is that there is no longer childhood and youth—all passes before its time, and I discern in too many people premature signs of moral ageing.'

Lermontov is older than Odoyevsky not in years but by an epoch. However, wittingly or unwittingly, he is bewitched by the phantom of another life incarnate in the bald young private. Lermontov's armour has been breached; each line about Sasha ends in a reference to himself, who was also born 'for those hopes, that poetry and happiness...'

We do not know, will never know, how Odoyevsky succeeded in finding a way to Lermontov's heart. We can only seek an explanation in another, similar occurrence. The celebrated critic Belinsky (who visited Lermontov in the guard-house on 16 April 1840): 'I argued with him, and I was cheered to notice in his rational, cold and embittered view of life and people the seeds of a profound belief in the value of both. I told him this—he smiled and said: "May God grant it be so..." For the first time I saw the real Lermontov, the Lermontov I had always hoped to see... How much aesthetic sense he possesses! What a gentle and delicate poetic soul!... It was no accident that I felt so drawn to him. I finally had the opportunity to see him in his true light. What a strange man he is. It is my belief that he regrets having allowed his real self to appear, even for a moment—I am sure of it.'

Belinsky was, of course, only three years older than Lermontov, almost the same age, and his personality was by no means 'Odoyevskyan', but the two situations are basically akin, similar in spirit.

Going back to the poem *In Memory of A.I.O.*, we can quickly identify that self-prophecy that is characteristic of great poets: society will have no mercy, and God won't come to rescue.

*But you died far from friends and family...
Peace to your heart, dear Sasha! Covered by
The earth of alien grasslands, let it slumber
As does to-day our friendship in the sombre
And silent graveyard of my memory.
You died like all die who are firm of spirit,
With little fuss. Some thought, unknown and deep,
Was on your brow writ when your eyes in sleep
Closed for all time. Those near enough to hear it
The last word that you spoke could not make out
And were about its meaning left in doubt.*

*Was't to your distant homeland a farewell,
 A dear friend's name, at life's untimely ending
 A cry of protest, or—for who can tell!—
 A moan by illness from you torn?... Ah, well,
 To us it's lost, that last, heart-rending,
 That painful utterance: its import we know not.
 Your deeds, your thoughts—all gone like cloudlets wrought
 Of water drops: with the descent of even
 They gleam and vanish, onward swiftly driven...
 Whence came they? Wherefore? Whither bound are they?—
 All futile questions these, for who can say!*

Tenderly (so unlike Lermontov): 'My dear Sasha!'

A stern critic should at this point find a doubt creeping into his mind: where in these lines about Odoyevsky is the portrait of the Decembrist, the revolutionary, the convict in penal servitude, the 'mad rebel', the author of seditious verse? It is as if Lermontov had completely failed to notice anything of the kind... However, for the moment we will not hurry to answer this question, but continue to listen...

'Slumber... with little fuss ... the silent graveyard...' Here are more signs, the clue to their secret: no one will hear; Sasha's spirit is 'mysterious'. Twice Lermontov repeats—

*Those near enough to hear it
 The last word that you spoke could not make out...*

*To us it's lost, that last, heart-rending,
 That painful utterance: its import we know not...*

Odoyevsky's last words are about Schiller, the inexperienced doctor, his father. Here is the last of the letters we possess, written by Odoyevsky to his friend and fellow-Decembrist Nazimov:

'My dear friend Mikhail Alexandrovich! I have lost my father: you knew him. I do not know how I was able to bear this blow—probably the last; any that may follow, whatever it might be, will be mild in comparison. It is all over for me. But I am very, very calm... I wish you more happiness, far more, than awaits me in this world. And you will (I am sure) be happier than I. Naryshkin and Lorer are taking a cure in Taman. Zagoretsky and Likharev send their greetings. We are still in Subashi... I am calm; I talk just like everyone else, but when I am alone with myself or am writing to friends who can share my sorrows, the feeling is that I do not belong to this world. Once more farewell.'

Such are the words of Odoyevsky shortly before his death: Lermontov probably knew much of this (which explains the rumour that he was present when Odoyevsky died, and that he even wrote verse at the bedside of the dying Decembrist). Incidentally, if Lermontov did not, in fact, know the details, it remains a fact that none of them contradict his poem; he guessed, he sensed, he deduced.

And now come the last lines of *In Memory of A.I.O.*:

*Your deeds, your thoughts—all gone like cloudlets wrought
Of water drops: with the descent of even
They gleam and vanish, onward swiftly driven...
Whence came they? Wherefore? Whither bound are they?—
All futile questions these, for who can say!
They leave no trace; in this they're like the passion,
The hopeless love of someone very young
Who'll not the dreams that so his heart have stung
Reveal to friends... Why should he! Their compassion
He does not need... O, let the world forget
A life so very alien to it, let
The crown of his attention pass you by
And slander's thorns not touch you!.. You refrained
From serving that base world, I saw you fly
Its shackling bounds and spurn its cunning chains.
You loved the noisy sea, the silent plains,
The jagged, toothy cliffs and mountains gloomy...
And now round your secluded, unknown grave
All that once joy and pleasure to you gave
Fate has miraculously placed. For looming
Beyond it, rear great peaks; by sun illumined,
The silver Caucasus seems to embrace the blue
And ever silent plain, and stretching to
The Black Sea, like a drowsy giant towers
O'er his shield bent; he listens at the hours
Pass on, to tales sung to him by the sea,
And it is never still and chants them tirelessly...*

Reminiscences disguised as poetry, reminiscences about what they told each other and understood in each other. 'All that once joy and pleasure to you gave' means 'gave to us' above all—the freedom of nature, the steppe, the Caucasian mountains, the sea. In the only letter to survive from his first period in exile, Lermontov shared with a friend the joys 'of a wandering life', the pleasure of interesting meetings with 'fine fellows', of 'ceaseless journeying', 'snow-covered mountains', 'the balm of mountain air', Georgian scenery; 'and if it were not for grandmother, then, frankly, I would willingly remain here' where, 'dressed like a Circassian, with a rifle across my

shoulder ... I slept in an open field, fell asleep to the cry of the jackal, ate churek¹ and drank Kakheti wine.'

However, in the Caucasus the two poets found not only natural beauty and kind-hearted people, but also a strange nostalgia which would not leave them. We know for certain that Odoyevsky spoke little of this, avoided complaining of it or revealing it—but Lermontov understood everything nonetheless and identified with it as his own. And once again we face the question—who is the older of the two? Onse—again— a— reference— to— childhood—

The hopeless love of someone very young...

And once again, for the second time, the requiem for Odoyevsky is also a requiem for himself.

A premonition, we repeat, so ordinary that it contains nothing— surprising—

*The silver Caucasus seems to embrace the blue
And ever silent plains...*

This is also a description of Lermontov's grave. True, the sea is missing—but Lermontov had time, just before his death, to say farewell to two seas—the Black Sea and the Caspian.

About Pushkin, Lermontov writes 'The bard's abode is cramped and dreary'². However, in the case of Odoyevsky and Lermontov, 'And now round your secluded, unknown grave all that once joy and pleasure to you gave'.

Lermontov's second exile in the Caucasus, which began very shortly after his parting with A.I.O., brought him into contact with the memories of his dear Sasha—in the same lands where, three years earlier: 'We wandered together in the mountains of the East.' He met Likharev, who witnessed Odoyevsky's last days, and Nazimov, who received Odoyevsky's last letter. Four months later, on 25 October 1840, a volume of Lermontov's verse is published in St Petersburg, and in it is the farewell to Odoyevsky.

During his last days in St Petersburg Lermontov had written:

*Clouds in the skies above, heavenly wanderers,
Long strings of snowy pearls stretched over azure plains!
Exiles like I, you rush farther and farther on,
Leaving my dear North, go distances measureless...*

¹ Caucasian bread.

² M.Y. Lermontov, 'Death of the Poet', tr. by Peter Tempest, in *Russian 19th Verse*, Raduga Publishers, Moscow, 1983, p. 117.

The clouds are a shadow, the twins of those evening clouds (in the poem *In Memory of A.I.O.*) which—

... gleam and vanish, onward swiftly driven...

Whence came they? Wherefore? Whither bound are they?—

All futile questions these, for who can say!

Then Lermontov was killed—two years, less one month, after the death of Odoyevsky, he teased death, tempted it in desperate forays and dangerous jokes.

Only a little while longer—and there could have been retirement, the long-coveted life of a civilian, literary work.

But not at the price of submission!

A condemned man, a 'martyr'. Just as A.I.O. was a condemned man when he did not wish to leave his remote corner, although promotion and retirement glittered on the not-too-distant horizon.

*The Russian bards embrace their chosen fate,
But never sing their swan song to the end...*

Such is the history of the friendship between Mikhail Lermontov and Alexander Odoyevsky. One month of travel together. Four years of recollections. Such is the sad and far from simple tale of Lermontov and the Decembrists. The ageing young men were angered, the worldly-wise Lermontov was sarcastically doubtful as to their experience. As for Odoyevsky, he was much older, but Lermontov was unable to anger him, could not quarrel with him. And who can tell what rejuvenating effect the company of private Odoyevsky had on the prickly cornet? He who came to love Odoyevsky did so while arguing with him, amazed that, after so many years in penal servitude and exile he retained the 'honest feeling flaming in his heart'; he came to love him even while not accepting religion in the sense Odoyevsky accepted it.

Sasha continued to smile

*His childish laugh rang freely,
His speech was lively, and his blue eyes shone;
He never lost, though knew he pain and strife,
His faith in man and in a better life...*

The time has come to pause briefly to discuss the absence of any reference to Odoyevsky the Decembrist in Lermontov's poetic monument to him. One thing we can state without hesitation: the Decembrists influenced the next generation both by the cause they had struggled for and by the uniqueness of their personalities. Some were remembered above all for their heroism, their

act of revolt, their sacrifice; others—for their dignity, resolution and cheerfulness while in penal servitude and exile; still others—for their smile amidst suffering and sorrow.

Odoyevsky came out onto the square—and this fact has entered into history.

Odoyevsky wrote poetry—and this has entered into literature.

However, over and above all of this, at the price of his career, his health and his life, at the price of bitter depressions and renewed inspiration, he evolved so exceptional, so gentle and light a spirit, such an extraordinary personality, that it was this, more than anything else, which struck Griboyedov and Lermontov and from there found its way imperceptibly into their works.

If it is possible to study the poetic interaction of different authors, similar images and epithets, (a subject for philology), then human interaction is no less important and necessary. And if this is so, this means, (without exaggerating, but also without belittling), that we will find the echo of conversations with Sasha in Lermontov's best works *A Hero of Our Time* and *Mtsyri*. If we read carefully the celebrated poem written immediately after *In Memory of A.I.O.*, we will notice a verse that runs—

*And, if for but a moment I can lose
Myself in memories—then, as I choose,
A free, free bird back to the past I fly,
And see myself a child;...*

*Already my poor heart is thrilled with a strange awe:
She comes into my thought, I weep and I adore,
Adore the creature of my dreaming,
Whose eyes are brimming full of azure flame....¹*

However, Lermontov, nonetheless, adds morosely:

Your deeds, your thoughts—all gone like cloudlets...

Of course, the easiest thing is to reject these lines; no! Odoyevsky's cause has not been forgotten; it has left its mark... But Lermontov well understands what he is talking about. And his poems are, in the end, themselves an act of self-refutation: they alone would have prevented Odoyevsky 'disappearing without trace'.

In our opinion, what Lermontov wishes to say is quite

¹ M.Y. Lermontov, 'How Frequently Amidst the Many-Coloured Crowd...', tr. by Avril Pyman, in Mikhail Lermontov, *Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p. 41.

simple: even if some trace remains—it makes no difference...

And thus it is that Lermontov has almost nothing to say about Odoyevsky the Decembrist or Odoyevsky the poet—he leaves this to future generations. However, and unfortunately, the most important theme in the verses Lermontov wrote about Odoyevsky has slipped out of view in the later studies of this subject. If we were to translate what Lermontov was seeking to express into plainer, less poetic language, then we would have to say that the main contribution made by Alexander Ivanovich Odoyevsky to Russian culture consisted not only (and perhaps not chiefly) in his public and literary activity, but also in his own personality, gentle, noble, cheerful, doomed...

This had been said by others before Lermontov, by Gribojedov and some of the Decembrists, but Lermontov was able to say it better and louder.

Thus the memory of Odoyevsky shed its strange light over Russia, and a tiny piece of that 'gentle flame' found its way into the noblest minds and hearts, making them wiser, kinder.

* * *

Twenty-two years passed since Odoyevsky's grave had disappeared, and 20 years since the death of Lermontov. Their eras, their generations were departing from the scene; now there appeared those descendants in whom Lermontov expected to find the 'heirs and citizens to come' with a stern judgement. He was right in thinking that the children of his generation (or the grandchildren of the Decembrists and of Pushkin) would be youthful once more.

The 6th issue of the almanach *Polar Star* was published by Herzen and Ogaryov at the beginning of 1861 in London—and immediately found its way by dozens of routes into Russia. It did not have the censor's stamp of permission, it would submit to no censorship.

This was the free Russian press, printing abroad much that could neither be published nor discussed at home...

It was forbidden to talk openly about the Decembrists or to print their works.

Following the impudent sally by Lermontov and the imprudent permission granted by the censor to No. 12 of *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* on 14 December 1839, decades passed without another mention being made of Odoyevsky.

However, the thick (358 pages) 6th volume of the *Polar Star* contained various poems written by Odoyevsky and other Decembrists many years previously in Siberia. The

last twenty pages of the almanach were given over to one of the founders of the Free Russian Press, Nikolai Platonovich Ogaryov: *Caucasian Waters* (extracts from my confession).

An epigraph from Lermontov: 'The world no mercy showed him, nor was he by Heaven saved, alas!..'

Ogaryov, exiled while still a youth, was only a few months older than Lermontov, that is, he belonged to the same generation, and it is, so to speak, his destiny: to go to the Caucasus without the right to return to the capital, but with the right to take medical treatment.

Let us listen to what he had to say:

'Without any doubt, Odoyevsky was the most remarkable of the Decembrists who were then in the Caucasus. Lermontov drew his portrait from life. Indeed! 'His childish laugh rang freely, his speech was lively, and his blue eyes shown', that will never be forgotten by anyone who knew him. His eyes expressed inner peace, sorrow not for his own sufferings but for the sufferings of mankind, they expressed compassion. Perhaps it was this, the most poetic aspect of Christianity, which attracted Odoyevsky most of all. He belonged wholly to that group of people who are Christ-like by nature. He wore his military greatcoat with the same calm as he bore his penal servitude in Siberia, with the same love for his neighbour, the same dedication to what he believed to be the truth, with the same calm acceptance of his sufferings. Perhaps he even loved his sufferings; that would have been wholly in keeping with the spirit of Christianity ... and not only of Christianity but of all dedication to a common cause, a cause held through conviction, in the spirit of all the suffering that does not hover around one's personality, around the blows to one's petty vanity. In Odoyevsky, the rejection of vanity was developed to its extreme...

'I can still recall the music of his voice—but nothing more. I feel that I committed a crime in writing nothing down, even secretly. In my thoughtlessness I even omitted to make a record of accounts of Siberia related by Odoyevsky or by others. I am also guilty of another crime: in the course of my wanderings I lost his portrait sketched in pencil back in Siberia and then lithographed...

'My meeting with Odoyevsky and the Decembrists aroused my sympathy to the point of enthusiastic admiration. I was gazing at our martyrs, I, who was travelling along their road and committing myself to the same fate... This feeling never left me. I wrote some verses in this vein

which were no doubt bad as to their form, for I then wrote a great deal and exceptionally badly, but which were perhaps utterly sincere in their content, for it could not have been otherwise. I sent these verses to Odoyevsky after long hesitation caught between my genuine love for him and my own conceited shyness. About two hours later I went myself to see him. He was standing in the middle of the room; my verses were lying on the table in front of him. He looked at me with an expression of profound and benevolent understanding and opened his arms to me: I ran towards him, embraced him and began to weep like a child. No! even now I am not ashamed of those tears; in truth they were not tears of empty vanity. At that moment my heart was too full of love for him and all the others, too sincere in its dedication to the common cause to be open to petty sentiments. These were moments of a rare purity, not because of my poetry, but because of the attitude they expressed towards that crucified generation that had begun the struggle, the generation that had taken up the call and was continuing the task.

'From that moment we grew very close—he as a teacher, and I as a pupil. There was over ten years' difference in our ages; my thoughts were not yet fully formed; he had developed in himself a body of convictions with which I may now not agree, but which were filled with sincerity and grandeur.'

How different is this confession from that of Lermontov!

And how essentially similar!

There is much they share in common, and the differences are interesting.

The reason is that the then young Ogaryov was not a man of the Lermontov stamp: he was not older than Odoyevsky!

Herzen and Ogaryov spent their childhood in Moscow, then went on to university, followed by exile—just like Lermontov; and they sensed and respected the genius of this poet of their generation.

However, Herzen was later to recall:

'Nothing can illustrate more vividly the change in thought that had taken place since 1825 than a comparison between Pushkin and Lermontov. Pushkin, often gloomy and discontent, outraged and full of indignation, was nonetheless prepared to sign a truce. He desired peace, he never lost hope of attaining it; in his heart there still echoed the memory of the days of Emperor Alexander. Lermontov, on the other hand, had become so accustomed to despair and hostility that he not only did not seek a way out, but did not see any possibility of struggle or conciliation. Lermontov never knew hope, he did not

sacrifice himself, for nothing demanded such self-sacrifice from him. He did not stride, head held high, towards his executioner, as did Pestel and Ryleyev, because he could not believe in the value of sacrifice; he swerved aside and died for nothing.'

This is not the place for a critique of the comparison drawn by Herzen: this was his opinion (several years after the death of Lermontov). His assessment has the value of personal recollection and it coincides with the impressions of other notable contemporaries of Lermontov.

Pushkin appeared remote, a great deal older, a great poet, but not one of their own. With Lermontov these Moscow youths were, as it were, on familiar terms, while Pushkin was infinitely remote. However, as they understood it, Lermontov rejected everything, both struggle and conciliation. He knew what is bad; but then, what is good? (Once again, we will not discuss here whether or not they were correct—this is their opinion, and such was Lermontov's reputation!)

'Love,' one of them was to write, 'is far more intuitive than hate.' And to Herzen, Ogaryov and the whole of 'young Moscow' Pushkin was more important and interesting because he had always sought a solution (although, as they were firmly convinced, not always in the right place).

Lermontov, however, was not seeking any solution.

Yet a solution there must be!

Lermontov knew of this belief, so simple and so important. He was acutely aware of it—otherwise he would not have been so moved by Sasha Odoyevsky.

However, before Lermontov's *In Memory of A.I.O.* had appeared in print, Ogaryov had himself already talked with the Decembrist, who by then had only 10-11 months left to live.

How diverse is the operation of the Odoyevskian fascination. However, what is most significant here is not that the religiously exalted youth Ogaryov throws himself into the arms of the martyr and Christian, Odoyevsky, but the character of a man who, many years later, could so movingly recall this far-off episode.

Caucasian waters was written around 1861 when Ogaryov was already a revolutionary democrat, a materialist, a socialist who had long since abandoned immature dreams mingled with religious enthusiasm, had long since selected his path in life, had long followed in the footsteps of the Decembrists, and who swore, together with Herzen, in the name of 'the five martyrs'.

Yet how grateful was Ogaryov to Odoyevsky, to that

'Christ-like personality'; what a rare ability he had of not rejecting his 'old errors' but understanding their place in his own, very changeable life.

And Ogaryov was permanently indebted to Odoyevsky, for his most important contribution to Russian culture, without belittling his poetry, his journalism, is also the fact that Nikolai Platonovich was a very fine man.

If he had not been such a fine man, he would not have dared become a revolutionary, would not have been that understanding, conscientious judge whom the great Herzen trusted more than himself in delicate moral questions.

'I particularly remember,' continues Ogaryov, 'how, one night, Odoyevsky and I went into the forest, along the path to the spring. Above us, all along the path, the trees had twisted fantastically together to form a dense bower, and a crescent moon glittered through the dark foliage. It was a magnificent night. We sat down on a bench and Odoyevsky read his verse to me. I listened, my head bent. It was about a vision of some bright female image who appeared to him in a transparent mist and slowly— disappeared.

Long I followed her ethereal step...

'He ended, and this line and his voice continued to ring in my ears. The line remained in my memory; now the image of Odoyevsky himself, with his musical voice in the evening peace of the forest, also seems to be a vision which appeared and disappeared in the moonlight of a Caucasian night.'

That is the title we have given to this section of our book, 'Ethereal Footsteps', because it seems to describe Alexander Ivanovich.

The ethereal footstep of Odoyevsky was noted by his fellow Decembrists, by Ogaryov and Lermontov.

And the gentle light that flows through the tales and verses about Odoyevsky shines even upon those who never saw him.

5

A Genius and a Reader



'I read Ogaryov's *Memoirs* with great pleasure, and I was proud of the fact that, although I had not yet met a single Decembrist, I sensed the Christian mysticism typical of these people.'

Such were the words addressed to Herzen (9 April 1861) by one of the most informed readers of the almanach that he and Ogaryov published together, the 33-year-old Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy.

He read Lermontov, Ogaryov, met with Decembrists who returned from exile, with those who had said farewell to Sasha Odoyevsky back in the 1830s, who had never seen him again, and who, while still in exile, had mourned his passing.

Tolstoy met Volkonsky and others who returned home 30 years later. The generation of Lev Tolstoy understood these messengers from the past more easily than Lermontov had understood his Caucasian Decembrists. The 1860s proved to be closer to the 1820s than the 1840s had been. History had come full circle: despondency, weariness, the many years of silence had disappeared without trace. Once more there was an upsurge and hope—and the young people of the 1860s had little difficulty in understanding the youthful old men returning from Siberia.

How they would have liked Odoyevsky if he, only 54 years old, had returned from Siberia.

But it was not to be!

It was Lermontov and Ogaryov, who presented him, eternally young, to the new, young Russia.

And, finally, Lev Tolstoy. However, not straight away: for the moment A.I.O. had left no clear mark on the early drafts of the novel *The Decembrists* from which, several years later, would emerge *War and Peace*.

As well as his meetings in Moscow with those of 1825 who returned under amnesty, Tolstoy also treasured his recollections of the Caucasus.

While in the Caucasus, taking part in the last actions of an interminable war that had been in progress almost since the day of his birth and had once swallowed up Odoyevsky and Lermontov (and many more besides), Tolstoy heard of the wild daring of Lermontov's friend, Rufin Dorokhov, already mentioned here (and of whom much will pass to Dolokhov in *War and Peace*). There, in the Caucasus, Tolstoy met the 'Caucasian captives' and

learned about the Caucasian Decembrists. By that time they were either in retirement or in the grave.

Having been 'in Asia', in the places once known to Odoyevsky, the writer was then able, from what he had heard, from the poems of Lermontov, to imagine the ethereal footsteps.

Later, under the influence of Ogaryov's story, of *The Polar Star* No. 6, these vague images took on a clearer outline—and Tolstoy rejoiced to discover that his intuitive interpretation had been confirmed. What interested the novelist most in Odoyevsky was what he would later term his 'Christian mysticism'. As yet, however, all this was reduced to one phrase reminiscent of the ideals of Tolstoy himself. Odoyevsky was not forgotten, but he did not find his way into *War and Peace*.

For the moment, just for the moment, we will leave the amazing posthumous biography of 'dear Sasha' Odoyevsky, and turn to another celebrated Decembrist ... the Decembrist who never was.

The Last Touches

'I have had the opportunity,' wrote Lev Tolstoy, 'of seeing those Decembrists who returned from Siberia, and I knew their companions, their contemporaries, who betrayed them and remained in Russia, enjoying honour and wealth. The Decembrists, who lived by their own inner resources during their penal servitude and exile, returned 30 years later in good spirits, intelligent and cheerful, while those who remained in Russia and spent their life in government service, attending dinners and playing cards, were pathetic ruins of no use to anyone, who had done nothing by which their lives might be remembered; it might have seemed that those condemned and exiled were the unhappy ones, and happy those who were spared, but after 30 years it became clear that happiness was to be found not in Siberia and not in St Petersburg, but in the human spirit, and that penal servitude and exile, loss of liberty, spelt happiness, while the rank of general, wealth and liberty spelt catastrophe.'

Nicholas I outlived 65 of the Decembrists, but 56 Decembrists outlived him (we are speaking here of the revolutionaries condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court). Some of the survivors did not, it is true, live long enough to return home but died shortly before or shortly after the amnesty.

Beginning in the autumn of 1856, the ageing Decembrists started coming back one by one from distant Siberian towns and villages to the places from which they had once

been taken away in chains. Most of the amnestied exiles were not permitted to live in St Petersburg or Moscow, and soon Obolensky, Batenkov and Svistunov arrived in Kaluga. Matvei Muravyov-Apostol moved to Tver, Pushchin settled on his wife's estate, and the ailing Ivan Dmitriyevich Yakushkin, expelled from Moscow, took up residence on the Novinki estate which belonged to an old comrade from the Semyonovsky regiment, I. N. Tolstoy.

Before being dispatched to the provinces, however, quite a number of these elderly ex-prisoners gathered in Moscow, gazing in astonishment at a city and a people which seemed to them to have changed so much in the course of 30 years. They felt awkward and strange amidst the new generations. However, Moscow was waiting for them.

Judging by diaries and letters, the people of the 20s and those of the 50s who met each other at that time found that they liked each other and had more in common than they had expected.

In January 1857, the well-known scholar and collector of Russian folklore, A. N. Afanasyev, makes the following entry in his diary: 'Met the Decembrists returned from exile and was astonished that, after suffering so much for so long, they had managed to preserve their strength and the freshness of their feelings and thoughts. Matvei Iv. Muravyov-Apostol and Pushchin won the hearts of all who met them. On arriving in Moscow, Pushchin was cheerful and full of wit; he appeared to me to be much younger than he actually is, and his lively conversation imprinted itself on the memory; turning to some officials playing at liberalism he said: "Well then, why don't you set up a small secret society!"'

In August 1857, having learned of the death of I. D. Yakushkin, Afanasyev writes: 'What a pity; this old man had so much youthful integrity, so much that was noble and fine. The new generation is scarcely able to offer his like: all this is a harvest ripe before its time! I can still remember with what enthusiasm he proposed a toast to his fair maid, to Russian freedom, and the deep conviction with which he repeated the lines of Pushkin: "Dear friend, have faith: the wakeful skies presage a dawn of wonder..."'

So they returned, and with them they brought history.

From the Biography of the Decembrist Pyotr Kirillovich Bezukhov

'It was on the eve of St Nikolai's day, the 5th of December, 1820. That year Natasha, with her husband and

children, had been staying at Bleak Hills since the beginning of autumn. Pierre was in Petersburg, where he had gone on private business of his own, as he said, for three weeks. He had already been away for six, and was expected home every minute.

'On this 5th of December there was also staying with the Rostovs Nikolai's old friend, the general on half-pay, Vassili Fedorovich Denisov.'

The 5th of December 1820, is the last date in *War and Peace*, the epilogue. Fifteen and a half years have passed since that July (or June) day in 1805² when Chapter I of Part I opened in the salon of the 'distinguished' Anna Pavlovna Sherer.

Of all those who had then filled Anna Pavlovna's drawing room, only one—Pierre—is present on that last evening at Bleak Hills.

Pyotr Kirillovich Bezukhov, the illegitimate but later legitimised son of a wealthy grandee of the time of Catherine, was born in 1784 or 1785; 'At ten years of age Pierre had been sent with an abbe as tutor to be educated abroad, and there he had remained till he was twenty', returning to Moscow three months prior to his appearance in the drawing room of Anna Pavlovna Sherer, that is, in the spring of 1805.

His father gives him money and asks him to choose a career; the son considered first one, then another, but chose nothing.

That summer evening the 'blasphemous words' of the young man shock the guests of the 'famous fraulein':

'The Revolution was a grand fact... Napoleon is great because he has towered above the Revolution and subdued its evil tendencies, preserving all that was good—the equality of all citizens, and freedom of speech and of the press.'

It would seem that the young Bezukhov is almost a Jacobin; at any rate he approves of their basic ideas and sees Napoleon as the heir of freedom; although young and amusing, he is no more amusing than those who join in the attack against him for such words. 'He did not know which to answer. He looked at them all and smiled...' The vicomte, who was seeing him for the first time, 'saw clearly that this Jacobin was by no means so formidable

¹ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (Tr. Constance Garnet), The Modern Library, New York, p. 1082. (All subsequent quotes from *War and Peace* are taken from the same source.)

² A slight discrepancy: Anna Pavlovna invited the guests 'in July', yet it was 'a June in St Petersburg, without twilight'.

as his words.'

The vicomte was right; at this time and in this place Pierre was not 'formidable'. However, this well-intentioned youth, had he, for example, found himself caught up in the movement of 1793, would, perhaps, have become part of it without a second thought, and then he would have been part of a formidable force. Conditions in Russia, however, allowed time for thought, time to test and choose.

Autumn 1805. The death of old count Bezukhov. Pierre inherits the title and the largest fortune in Russia.

End of 1805. Pierre is married to Yelena Vassilyevna (Helene) Kuragina.

4 March 1806. The duel with Dolokhov in which Dolokhov is wounded. The following day Pierre leaves Helene.

The First Doubt

Shortly after his final meeting with his wife, at the Torzhok staging post, Pierre thinks to himself: 'And I shot Dolokhov because I considered myself injured. Louis XVI was executed because they considered him to be a criminal, and a year later his judges were killed too for something. What is wrong? What is right? What must one love, what must one hate? What is life for, and what am I? What is life? What is death? What force controls it all?' And there was no answer to any of these questions save one, and it was not a logical answer, nor an answer to any of these questions. The answer was: "One dies, and it's all over. One dies and finds it all out, or ceases asking." But dying too was terrible.'

The previous summer, in the salon of Anna Pavlovna Sherer, it was the Jacobin who was talking, but now those attractive, universal ideas have been brought into question, have given way before the private and personal.

How long for?

At that same staging post, at that very moment, Pierre meets an old freemason, Osip Alexeyevich Bazdeyev, who urges the young man to change his life, to think of his fellow men, of slaves: 'Have you chosen a place in the service where you might be of use to your neighbour?'

After this conversation 'there was left in his soul not a trace of his former doubts. He firmly believed in the possibility of the brotherhood of men, united in the aim of supporting one another in the path of virtue. And freemasonry he pictured to himself as such a brotherhood.'

Shortly afterwards he is accepted into the order, but of the whole lengthy and mysterious ritual of the free-



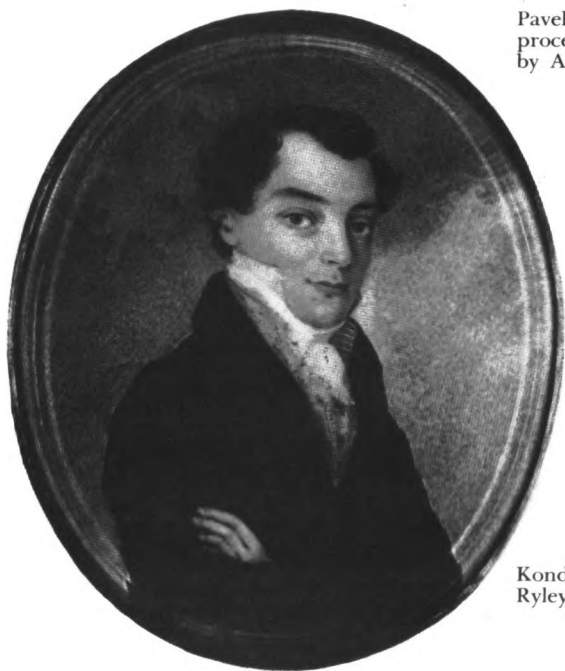
The December Uprising (Senate Square)



Mikhail Orlov



Pyotr Kakhovsky



Pavel Pestel during court
proceedings (drawing
by A.A. Ivanovsky) ►

Kondrati
Ryleyev

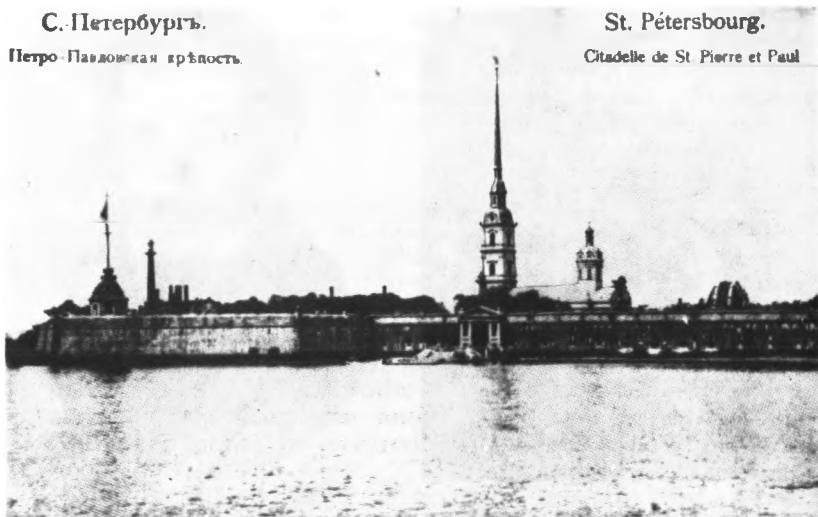
Peter and Paul Fortress

С. Петербургъ.


Петро-Павловская крѣпость.

St. Pétersbourg.

Citadelle de St Pierre et Paul





Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin
(drawing by A.A. Ivanovsky) 



Sergei
Muravyov-Apostol



Nikita
Muravyov



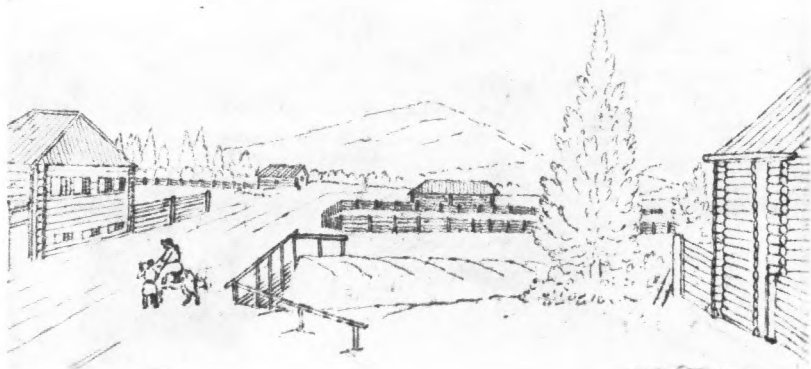


Mikhail Lunin



Sergei
Trubetskoy

The Chita prison (drawing by Nikolai Bestuzhev)

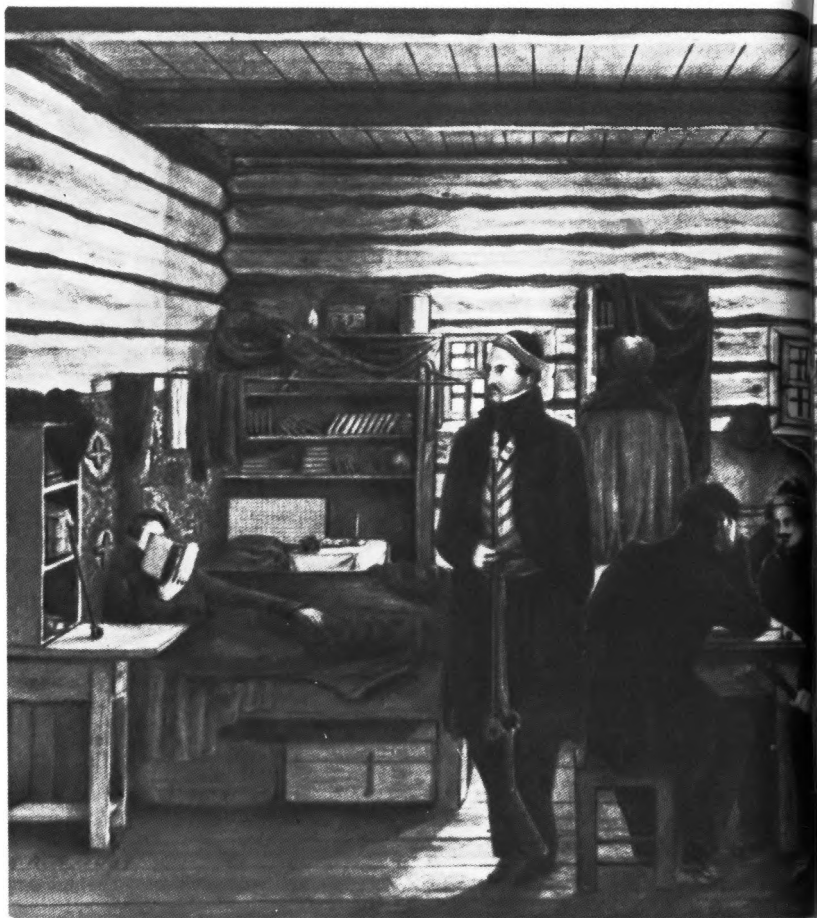


Alexander
Odoyevsky



The inner courtyard of the Chita prison





Alexander
Gorchakov



Decembrists in the Chita prison

Ivan Pushchin



Sergei
Volkonsky

A view of the Chita prison







Ivan Gorbachevsky



Nikolai Panov

Matvei
Muravyov-Apostol





Ivan
Annenkov

Decembrists by the prison gates in Chita





Alexandrina Muravyova



Camilla Ivasheva (Le Dantu)



Maria
Volkonskaya
with her son



Yekaterina
Trubetskaya



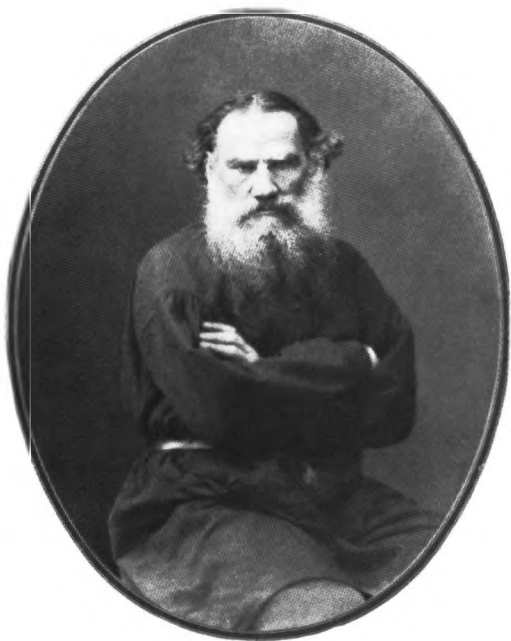
Alexander Pushkin



Mikhail
Lermontov



Alexander
Griboyedov



Lev Tolstoy



Alexander
Herzen



Pyotr Chaadayev

Pyotr Vyazemsky



Ivan Yakushkin

masons, one purpose inspires Bezukhov:

"To combat the evil that is paramount in the world".... Pierre repeated, and a mental image of his future activity in that direction rose before him... The purification and regeneration of himself had little interest for him because, at that moment, he was full of a blissful sense of being completely cured of all his former vices, and being ready for nothing but goodness.'

The irony of the author is barely concealed: the reader has little cause to doubt that, in fact, Pierre is by no means 'completely cured of his former vices' and that, while preparing himself to save others, has not yet saved himself.

The Jacobin outbursts are now in the past, but the spiralling path of life brings Count Bezukhov back to a point of view similar to the one he had when he appeared in the salon of Anna Pavlovna Sherer. However, it seems clear that he would in any case have returned to 'social life': if not Bazdeyev, then he would have met another spiritual counsellor, for each man meets those whom he needs to meet, and passes by those who are not necessary to him (however noble, however remarkable, but needed by others). The number of human 'collisions' in life is too great to doubt the high probability of the necessary encounter...

Pierre needs Bazdeyev in March 1806, just as six years later he will need Karataev.

Whatever the case may be, Pierre returns to society. He is once more a public figure, one who has chosen the post in which he will be of use to his neighbour.

1807. Pierre travels to the Ukraine, and then visits the Bolkonskys. He strives to learn about the peasant way of life, to be of benefit to his fellow men, but each time things turn out the opposite of what he expects: out of his honest efforts comes deception, and his good intentions yield evil fruit. Moreover, Prince Andrei doubts the efficacy of philanthropic endeavours. He has less faith than Pierre in the common cause.

"In that way I lived for others, and not almost, but quite spoilt my life, and I have become more successful since I lived only for myself."

"But how are you living only for yourself?" Pierre asked, getting hot.'

Thus begins the famous dispute in which the prince sets out to prove to the count that actually the peasants require neither schools nor hospitals.

He is ready to admit:

"I'm building a house and laying out a garden, while

you are building hospitals. Either occupation may serve to pass the time. But as to what's right and what's good—leave that to one who knows all to judge, it's not for us to decide.”

Bolkonsky is of the opinion that the emancipation of the serfs is necessary not so much for the peasants but ‘for the people who are ruined morally, who are devoured by remorse, who stifle that remorse and grow callous from being able to inflict punishment all around them... “So that’s what I grieve for—for human dignity, for peace of conscience, for purity, and not for their backs or their heads, which always remain just the same backs and heads, however you thrash or shave them.”

“No, no, a thousand times no! I shall never agree with you”, said Pierre.’

Oh, these peasants whom, it would seem, there is no need to free from their role as beasts of burden.... Throughout the entire novel there seems to be no direct reference to this question ‘from the point of view of the peasants’, while the point of view of Prince Andrei is tacitly present to the last day—5 December 1820.

In that conversation with his friend in the summer of 1807, Pierre takes up approximately that position which, a year previously, had been adopted by the old mason Bazdeyev when talking to Pierre:

“If there is a God and there is a future life, then there is truth and there is goodness; and the highest happiness of man consists in striving for their attainment. We must live, we must love, we must believe,” said Pierre, “that we are not only living today on this clod of earth, but have lived and will live for ever there in everything” (he pointed to the sky).

“Yes, if only it were so!” Andrei sighed, and this time it was that Pierre’s exhortation found the man who needed it.’ ‘Pierre’s visit was for Prince Andrei an epoch from which there began, though outwardly unchanged, a new life in his inner world.’

However, the time is coming when the preacher himself would again feel doubt, again, at a further stage in his life, compare himself to the man he was at the beginning of March 1806, when he asked:

‘What is wrong? What is right?’

But not for a while yet.

1808. Pierre ‘by no design of his own, had taken a leading position among the freemasons in Petersburg’.

Pierre began to feel dissatisfied with what he was doing. Freemasonry, at least as he knew it here, seemed to him something to rest simply upon formal observances.

He never dreamed of doubting of freemasonry itself, but began to suspect that Russian freemasonry had got onto a false track and was deviating from its original source. And so, towards the end of the year, Pierre went abroad to devote himself to the higher mysteries of the order.'

Summer 1809. Count Bezukhov returns to St Petersburg, where he reads to the 'Petersburg brothers' a message from the leaders of the order, a message with which he clearly agrees, for it deals not with externals, but with essentials.

Jacobinism is decisively rejected: 'Are we to welcome revolutions, to overthrow everything, to repel violence by violence?... No, we are very far from that. Every reform by violence is to be deprecated, because it does little to correct the evil while men remain as they are, and because wisdom has no need of violence.'

What is to be done in such a situation? asks Pierre, and he gives that remarkable answer which should be borne in mind through the whole course of subsequent events:

'The whole plan of our order should be founded on the training of men of character and virtue, bound together by unity of conviction and aim,—the aim of suppressing vice and folly everywhere, by every means, and protecting talent and virtue, raising deserving persons out of the dust and enrolling them in our brotherhood. Only then will our order obtain the power insensibly to tie the hands of the promoters of disorder, and to control them without their being aware of it... As soon as we have a certain number of capable men in every state, each of them training again two others, and all keeping in close co-operation, then everything will be possible for our order, which has already done so much in secret for the good of humanity.'

The majority of the 'brothers' gave a cold reception to this speech, detecting in it 'the dangerous projects of illuminism'.

Without going deep into history and theory, suffice it to say that, on the lips of their critics, the derogatory term 'illumini' meant approximately the following: instead of a 'worthy' and agreeable way of passing the time, Bezukhov is proposing to found a Secret Society which will penetrate unobtrusively into every corner and gradually assume political and spiritual power.

And were not his opponents correct? Was not Bezukhov indeed proposing something very similar to the future Decembrist Union of Welfare—the 'League of the Future'?

However, we will leave that till later... Nor will we stop to discuss here whether, in the summer of 1809, such a Decembrist speech could have been pronounced in a

masonic lodge!

Having learned that his proposal to create a secret society was not accepted, Pierre 'without waiting for the usual formalities, left the lodge and went home'.

End of 1809-1810. 'Again Pierre was overtaken by that despondency he so dreaded.' But he tried not to give way, sought to preserve the priceless gift of fate, his faith in a noble idea. He took upon himself the guilt of doubt; tried to cure himself: self-improvement (a diary of self-observation), reconciliation with Helene, an attempt to serve on 'one of the committees'. Meanwhile it seemed that Prince Andrei, who had returned to the capital, had taken to heart what Pierre had told him in the summer of 1807: he had entered government service, and was engaged in successful work there; was involved in the preparation of major progressive reforms. It is then that he proposed to Natasha Rostova.

1811. 'After Prince Andrei's engagement to Natasha, Pierre suddenly, for no apparent reason, felt it impossible to go on living in the same way as before. Firm as his belief was in the truths revealed to him by his benefactor, the old freemason, and happy as he had been at first in the task of perfecting his inner spiritual self, to which he had devoted himself with such ardour, yet after Prince Andrei's engagement to Natasha, and the death of Osip Alexeyevich, the news of which reached him almost simultaneously, the whole zest of his religious life seemed to have suddenly vanished...'

He gave up keeping his diary, avoided the society of brother-masons, took to visiting the clubs again and to drinking a great deal, associated once more with gay bachelor companions...

'How horrified he would have been if, seven years before, when he had just come home from abroad, any one had told him that there was no need for him to look about him and rack his brains, that the track had long ago been trodden, marked out from all eternity for him, and that, struggle as he would, he would be just such another as all men in his position...

'Had he not passionately desired and believed in the regeneration of the sinful race of man and the schooling of himself to the highest point of perfect virtue? Had he not founded schools and hospitals and liberated his serfs?'

And here Pyotr Kirillovich repeated, almost word for word, the questions that he had asked in those moments of crisis in 1806, when he had left Helene and was sitting at the staging post in Torzhok:

“What is wrong? What is right? What must one love, what must one hate? What is life for, and what am I? ... And there was no answer to any of these questions.”

Thus ended the second cycle in the life of Count Bezukhov—and he was only 26 or 27 years old.

In those days, however, people were in a hurry to live, in a hurry to feel—perhaps because they still hoped to have time to do so?

The Third Cycle

Winter 1811-1812

From Arbat Square in Moscow, almost in the middle of the sky above Prechistensky Boulevard, one could see ‘the huge, brilliant comet of 1812’. It seemed to Pierre that it was in full harmony with what was in his softened and emboldened heart, that had gained vigour to blossom into a new life.’

The reason was, of course, that Count Pyotr Kirillovich had fallen in love with the young countess, Natalya Ilyinichna...

This love (like all love) had a strange and magical effect upon the beliefs and ideas of the lover. Lev Nikolayevich, an expert on this question, notes two, apparently contradictory sensations experienced by Bezukhov: 1) ‘nothing exists except her’, 2) thanks only to her ‘everything has come alive again’.

‘Ever since that day when Pierre had looked up at the comet in the sky on his way home from the Rostovs and, recalling Natasha’s grateful look, had felt as though some new vista was opening before him, the haunting problem of the vanity and senselessness of all things earthly had ceased to torment him. It was not that the terrible question: why? what for? which had till then haunted him in the midst of every occupation was now replaced by any other question, nor by an answer to the old question; rather its place was filled by the image of *her*. If he heard or talked of trivialities, or read or was told of some instance of human baseness or folly, he was not cast down as of old; he did not ask himself why people troubled, when all was so brief and uncertain. But he thought of her as he had seen her last, and all his doubts vanished.’

It was then that Pierre experienced that ‘puzzling disquiet’ which was the first sign of a new burst of activity. What that activity would be, he himself did not yet know: his former masonic activity was clearly unsatisfactory, but this new turn in that same spiral of

life was gradually bringing it into correspondence with the earlier, happy years when he was filled with the idea of serving his neighbour.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Pierre's recent coolness towards the 'brothers' now gave way to new meetings and contacts—but these meetings (unlike the earlier ones) no longer had any value in themselves: Pierre was seeking a sign from fate and inspiration for a new course of action, the nature of which the masons did not even suspect: one of the brothers acquainted him with a prophecy concerning Napoleon that has been extracted from Apocalypse, and Pierre immediately gave it a personal interpretation that involved a mysterious link between himself and the fate of the French emperor.

Later, on the day when the French entered Moscow, Pierre rushed to the house of his late advisor, Bazdeyev. It was in that 'quiet abode' that he decided to resort to the most energetic action; he dressed as a commoner and got hold of a pistol with the aim of 'putting a limit to the power of the beast'.

His feelings for Natasha suggested something different, something sweet, the mysterious world of love—but their union seemed totally impossible, and thus this new burst of activity was feverish and ill-defined, as if lacking a purpose (though behind it all lay some obscure ideal connected with Natasha).

In the Slobodsky Palace at the beginning of the war of 1812, Pierre returned, as it were, 7 years into the past, to the salon of Anna Pavlovna, and expressed bold, 'Jacobin' sentiments, demanding that the Tsar give an explanation of the situation to the people; and once more the audience attacked him, just as they had before in the drawing room of Anna Sherer, and he 'wanted to protest, but was unable to say a word', suddenly he announced that he would arm 1,000 men at his own expense... Later he suddenly departed for Borodino and took part in the battle there, then, equally suddenly, decided to remain in Moscow¹, suddenly prepared himself for self-sacrifice, being, in the author's words, 'in a state akin to madness'. Just for a moment, in his weariness, there returned to him from his 'periods of despondency' the previous suspicion that there was no such thing as the just man or the guilty man, that the future held nothing, and that there was no way out of this situation—but such thoughts soon passed away.

A hypnotist instructed a hypnotised man to do something (for example, to take a book from the table and put it on

¹ I. e., after the arrival of the French—*Tr.*

a chair) ten minutes after waking. When he awoke, the man was extremely perturbed, trying to remember something, striving feverishly to act upon it—and suddenly he carried out the instruction that had been planted in his subconsciousness: he moved the book (though he could not explain why). Pierre resembles this hypnotised man. Before, in his 'Jacobin' and 'masonic' days, he had been inwardly more calm and had done what he believed to be correct. Now, however, he was acutely aware that the truth he sought was close at hand, and he strove by constant and diverse activity to draw nearer to it. At the inn in Mozhaisk, Pierre seemed about to discover the truth at last: there appeared to him those whose faces were simple, kind and resolute.

Simplicity, fearlessness before death, yet again simplicity, suffering—it is easy to see that Pierre was struggling towards that which he would soon, after meeting Karataev, come to understand.

He already needs Karataev, and their meeting is inevitable.

Several times, it seemed to Pierre, 'those' whom he saw in his prophetic dream urged him on to act—and two quite distinct feelings which 'irresistibly attracted Pierre' seemed to draw him on to carry out a still dimly grasped instruction which was as yet hidden, but which demanded discovery, and which was about to be discovered.

'The first was the craving for sacrifice and suffering... The other was that vague and exclusively Russian feeling of contempt for everything conventional, artificial, human, for everything that is regarded by the majority of men as the highest good in the world. Pierre had for the first time experienced that strange and fascinating feeling in the Slobodsky Palace, when he suddenly felt that wealth and power and life, all that men build up and guard with such effort, is only worth anything through the joy with which it can all be cast away.'

The Meeting with Karataev

2 September 1812. Napoleon enters Moscow. Pierre remains in the city, rescues a French captain and spends the evening with him.

3 September. Pierre seeks an opportunity to assassinate Napoleon, but he is seized on Povarskaya St.

8 September, Pierre is taken to Marshall Davout. Then—the firing squad; and Bezukhov, convinced that he is about to die, suddenly realises that he has survived. He is sent to a barrack for prisoners-of-war. It is there that he

meets Karataev, and the dream becomes reality: he has discovered the spirit of simplicity and truth.

'And it was just at this time that he attained that peace and content with himself for which he had always striven in vain before. For long years of his life he had been seeking in various directions for that peace, that harmony with himself, which had struck him so much in the soldiers at Borodino. He had sought for it in philanthropy, in freemasonry, in the dissipations of society, in wine, in heroic feats of self-sacrifice, in his romantic love for Natasha; he had sought it by the path of thought; and all his researches and all his efforts had failed him. And now, without any thought of his own, he had gained that peace and that harmony with himself simply through the horror of death, through hardships, through what he had seen in Karataev. Those fearful moments that he had lived through during the execution had, as it were, washed for ever from his imagination and his memory the disturbing ideas and feelings that had once seemed to him so important.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Pierre. And he talked aloud to himself. "The soldier did not let me pass. They have taken me—shut me up. They keep me prisoner. Who is *me*? Me—my immortal soul! Ha, ha, ha!... Ha, ha, ha!"

Dramatic changes in the life of an adult are, apparently, always explosive; crushing disillusionment or a commuted death penalty, or some other overwhelmingly powerful experience.

It is only in bad literature that people undergo rapid change under warm and gentle influences: in real life, and in good literature, such change is an explosion. Thus Bezukhov can, with the help of Karataev, suddenly come to understand the meaning of life only because he, Bezukhov, was led out to execution.

'All Pierre's dreams now turned to the time when he would be free. And yet, in all his later life, Pierre thought and spoke with enthusiasm of that month of imprisonment, of those intense and joyful sensations that could never be recalled, and above all of that full, spiritual peace, of that perfect, inward freedom, of which he had only experienced at that period.'

Let us for a moment move on from 1812 to think about what was to follow 'in all his later life'. We can follow this life up to December 1812. However, we also have some idea of what must happen to him later.

'Those who knew Prince Pyotr Kirillovich B. at the beginning of the reign of Alexander II in the 1850s, when Pyotr Kirillovich, white with age, returned from Siberia,

would have found it difficult to imagine him at the beginning of the reign of Alexander I, a carefree, muddle-headed and impetuous youth who had just returned from abroad, where, on the wishes of his father, he had completed his education' (one of the versions for the first volume of *War and Peace*).

Thirty years of prison and exile awaited the young count, who gained his first experience of prison life in the Moscow army barracks. And who can tell—perhaps the wisdom that Pierre should have acquired during his sufferings in Siberia was, by the will of the author, his creator, transferred to the year 1812 (when the decision was still not to follow the heroes of the novel further than 1820).

Such, for the moment, was the decision.

However, in 1869, when Tolstoy was completing the last volume of his epic work, had he still not abandoned the idea of a continuation, an account of Bezukhov's penal servitude in Siberia?

When beginning his *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin admitted that he could not yet foresee how his 'freely-structured novel will subsequently develop', how it would end.

Tolstoy seems to have seen the end clearly to start with, but then had second thoughts: in the draft introduction to his work he admits that initially, (in 1856), he set out to write a story whose hero was a Decembrist returning with his family to Russia. 'I found myself moving from the present to 1825, a period of errors and misfortunes for my hero, and I abandoned the beginning. But even in 1825 my hero was already a mature, married man. In order to understand him, I had to go back to his youth, and his youth coincided with that period so full of glory for Russia, the year 1812. Once more I abandoned the opening and began to write from 1812.'

It is hard for us to determine how long Tolstoy continued to work on the novel with the intention of extending it beyond 1825. Shortly before finishing the book, he told the poet Afanasi Fet that he hoped there would be 'another five volumes'.

What we can state with confidence, however, is that in prison inner freedom and that phrase 'in all his later life' reveal the author's intuition, his anticipation of Bezukhov's second imprisonment. Subsequently the period of exile did not figure in the book, was not described—but it is implicit, and as we read about 1812, we will think, as Tolstoy did when he wrote the chapters about Karataev, of 1826. Just before he dies, Platon Karataev tells the story of an innocent man exiled to Siberia. When

the truth was discovered, his sentence was repealed—but too late. Nonetheless, the message of this tale is not tragic, but optimistic: such people do exist, and justice does finally triumph. Indeed, Karataev himself was sent into the army for illegally cutting timber—‘we thought it was a misfortune, while it was all for our happiness. My brother would have had to go if it hadn’t been for my fault.’

Let us now look more closely at what happens to Pierre Bezukhov when he was a prisoner of the French in the autumn of 1812. Karataev merely put into words an idea that Bezukhov himself was seeking to express: everything is very simple—the purpose of life is to live simply and honourably.

Pierre no longer thought about Russia or the war, about politics or Napoleon. ‘It seemed obvious to him that all that did not concern him, that he was not called upon and so was not able to judge of all that. “Russia and summer never do well together,” he repeated Karataev’s words, and those words soothed him strangely. This project of killing Napoleon, and his calculations of the cabalistic numbers and of the beast of the Apocalypse, struck him now as incomprehensible and positively ludicrous. His anger with his wife, and his dread of his name being disgraced by her, seemed to him trivial and amusing...

‘He often thought now of his conversation with Prince Andrey, and agreed fully with his friend, though he put a somewhat different construction on his meaning.’

This meaning, this idea, with which Pierre now agreed, was the very idea which, that summer day in 1807, he had so energetically refuted (thereby also producing a strong impression on his interlocutor): namely, that ‘all the strivings towards positive happiness, that are innate in us, were only given us for our torment.’ Now, in 1812, happiness was ‘the enjoyment of eating when he was hungry, of drinking when he was thirsty, of sleep when he was sleepy, of warmth when he was cold, of talking to a fellow creature when he wanted to talk and hear men’s voices.’

And so, yet again, Pierre moves from the social to the personal, from plans to save the world to the clear and simple idea of living in peace with that world, reducing the most complex and universal questions to the simplest possible.

This represents a high level of wisdom, the third twist in the spiral of life; in writing this, Lev Tolstoy expressed his slowly-maturing programme for a simple life-style, for a change of ‘fundamental viewpoint’.

But can it be that the young idealist who tried to convince Prince Andrey that there was such a thing as the Common Cause, as God and purpose, has been overthrown by a new Pierre who has discovered the truth through suffering (for suffering is one of the guarantees of the truth, but then, back in 1807, there was no suffering—everything was easy, there had been no lessons learned through pain!).

Which one of them is correct, when is he correct?

‘Attachments, friendships, love, as Pierre understood them, Karataev had none; but he loved and lived on affectionate terms with every creature with whom he was thrown in life, and especially so with man—not with any particular man, but with the men who happened to be before his eyes. He loved his dog, loved his comrades, loved the French, loved Pierre, who was his neighbour. But Pierre felt that, in spite of Karataev’s affectionate tenderness to him (in which he involuntarily paid tribute to Pierre’s spiritual life), he would not suffer a moment’s grief at parting from him. And Pierre began to have the same feeling towards Karataev.’

Lev Nikolayevich willingly allows the inexperienced reader to be deceived: the lines quoted above are written in a major key, seems to be filled with optimism... This is life itself, not awareness of life; it is the content, not the form. But who has measured and compared the value of one with the other?

And Tolstoy continues:

‘On the third day after leaving Moscow, Karataev had a return of the fever which had kept him in the Moscow hospital, and as Karataev’s strength failed, Pierre held more aloof from him. Pierre could not have said why it was, but from the time Karataev fell sick, he had to make an effort to force himself to go near him. And when he did go near him and heard the subdued moans which Karataev often uttered, as he lay at the halting-places, and smelt the increasing odour from the sick man, Pierre moved further away from him and did not think about him.’

And finally:

‘Karataev looked at Pierre with his kindly, round eyes that were bright now with tears, and there was an unmistakable appeal in them. He evidently wanted to say something to him. But Pierre was in too great dread for himself. He made as though he had not seen that look, and hastily walked away.

‘When the prisoners set off again, Pierre looked back. Karataev was sitting under the birch tree by the edge of the road, and two Frenchmen were bending over him in

conversation. Pierre did not look again. He went on limping up the hill.

There was the sound of a shot behind, at the spot where Karataev was sitting. Pierre heard that shot distinctly, but at the moment that he heard it, he recalled that he had not finished reckoning up how many stages were left to Smolensk, the calculation he had begun before the marshal rode by. And he began to reckon.

Yet Karataev had called Pierre to him... And that other, earlier, 'masonic' or some other Pierre, if he had managed to survive this difficult episode (which is doubtful, for it was the new ideas that had given him new strength)—if he had survived, there is no question but that he would have gone up to the French, would have asked them to let him help, would have tried to carry the immobile Karataev—for Bezukhov was a powerful man. Tolstoy is ruthlessly realistic: he does not leave the reader any illusions, any room to believe that 'he would have died anyway'. That same night the group of prisoners with which Bezukhov was travelling was freed by the Cossacks—Karataev had needed only a couple more hours.

Why, then, did Tolstoy not allow Bezukhov, afterwards, in the course of his endless conversations with Natasha or the princess Maria, to express regret over those dreadful minutes? Probably because that was precisely what Bezukhov was like during those minutes: that was why he survived, acquiring a simple, saving wisdom and refusing to judge, assess, evaluate.

'And quite right, too!' one can sometimes hear from the pedagogue, the lecturer, the popular writer, for how can a positive hero do other than climb steadily upwards towards perfection; and could Tolstoy refute yet again a wisdom so close to his own point of view?

'The satisfaction of his needs—good food, cleanliness, freedom—seemed to Pierre, now that he was deprived of them, to be perfect happiness; and the choice of his occupation, that is, of his manner of life now that that choice was so limited, seemed to him such an easy matter that *he forgot* that a superfluity of the conveniences of life destroys all happiness in satisfying the physical needs, while a great freedom in the choice of occupation, that freedom which education, wealth and position in society had given him, makes the choice of occupation exceedingly difficult, and destroys the very desire and possibility of occupation.'

We could not help but underline this noteworthy 'he forgot'. 'He forgot'—one might think that he forgot his former freedom, his former abundance.

Yet is he not destined to return very shortly to that which either cannot be discarded (for example, education), or which would naturally renew itself of its own accord—wealth, social status?

And here is Pierre free once more and convalescing in Oryol.

“Ah, how good it is! How splendid!” And from old habit he asked himself the question, “Well, and what then? What am I going to do?” And at once he answered himself: “I am going to live. Ah, how splendid it is!”

‘What had worried him in the old days, what he had always been seeking to solve, the question of the object of life, did not exist for him now. That seeking for an object in life was over for him now; and it was no fortuitously or temporarily that it was over. He felt that there was no such object, and could not be. And it was just the absence of an object that gave him that complete and joyful sense of freedom that at this time made his happiness.’

The end is attained—the Russian, worldly variant of Nirvana, pantheistic egotism—like a flower that lives and does not think.

The ‘joyful sense of freedom that at this time made his happiness.’

Again we have decided to underline the note of warning that the question is not yet resolved, that this is merely the end of the terrible, soul-searching third twist in the continuing spiral of life.

5 December 1820

After the war, Pierre became simpler, kinder, wiser. He began to appreciate simply and accurately, all that he found near and around him:

‘In the old days he had been unable to see the great, the unfathomable and the infinite in anything. He had only felt that it must be somewhere and had been seeking it. In everything near and comprehensible he had seen only what was limited, petty, everyday, and meaningless. He had armed himself with the telescope of intellect and gazed far away into the distance, where that petty, everyday world, hidden in the mists of distance, had seemed to him great and infinite simply because it was not clearly seen. Such had been European life, politics, freemasonry, philosophy, and philanthropy in his eyes.’

Is there any need to point out that ‘European life, politics, freemasonry, philosophy and philanthropy’ were immeasurably less important to him now than they

had been before?

In 1813, Pierre married Natasha, and 7 years later he is already the happy father of three daughters and a son.

If the novel had ended here, if it were not for the epilogue, all those who have made the acquaintance of Count Pyotr Kirillovich would have every right to assume that the unwritten part of his biography resembled the everyday life of Count Nikolai Rostov: his family, his emotional ties with his relatives and friends, his business affairs—a calm and simple happiness in reward for past suffering. However, Count Tolstoy will not leave Count Bezukhov in peace. To begin with, Tolstoy wrote the following highly significant lines:

‘Rather than attending clubs and dinners, he sat at home and worked. During the seven years of his married life he read a large number of books, acquired a vast stock of knowledge, and had selected as his special field of study the social sciences, and in particular the newly emerging science of political economy.’

Later this explanatory paragraph was removed from the final version, leaving only the result of 7 years of study:

‘Two months previously, Pierre was already settled at the Rostovs’ when he received a letter from a certain Prince Fyodor, urging him to come to Petersburg for the discussion of various important questions that were agitating the Petersburg members of a society of which Pierre had been one of the chief founders.’

‘Two months previously’ brings us back to October 1820 and the Semyonovsky incident, when the regiment rebelled against the Arakcheyev practices and was disbanded, with the soldiers exiled into the provinces.

It would, of course, not be difficult to guess the identity of Count Fyodor (and, a little further on, Count Sergei). Among the Decembrists was one Prince Fyodor Tolstoy, a distant relative of the author and a well-known sculptor, who escaped the harsh punishments of 1826. As for the princes who figured prominently in ‘a certain society’—these are more likely to be Trubetskoy and Volkonsky, while the most important ‘society’ at that time was the famous Union of Welfare, and this, as we shall see later, is the one Tolstoy has in mind. If Pierre was ‘one of the founding fathers’ or, using the precise historical terminology ‘a member of the central board’ then he was a prominent member of a movement which still did not know that one day it would be called ‘Decembrist’, he was a conspirator occupying a position similar to that of one of the many brothers and cousins of the Muravyovs and

Muravyov-Apostols, to that of Fonvisin, Trubetskoy, Yakushkin, Pestel or Lunin.

The most likely fate, therefore, for the Decembrist Bezukhov is Siberia and for many years.

For those who were the first to read *War and Peace* at the end of the 1860s, this could be taken as understood; it was part of their structure of concepts, knowledge and recollections... And Tolstoy permits us to discern, hanging over the well-known descriptions of Natasha as 'a vigorous, handsome and fruitful mother', which frequently irritate the young reader, the sword of Damocles: the idyll will be shattered, Pierre will be exiled, and Natasha, naturally, will follow him.

However, the hardships are as yet still in the future, and in the meantime, on 5 December 1820, Pierre is rather late returning from the capital and, knowing his domestic habits, we realise that this delay means that the Decembrist meetings in St Petersburg were particularly important.

And now the chosen society goes into the study: it is composed exclusively of men—Nikolai Rostov, Vasili Denisov, Pierre and the 15-year-old Nikolinka Bolkonsky.

"Well," Pierre began, not sitting down but pacing the room and coming to an occasional standstill, lisping and gesticulating rapidly as he talked. "This is the position of things in Petersburg; the Tsar lets everything go. He is entirely wrapped up in this mysticism" (mysticism Pierre could not forgive in anybody now). "All he asks for is peace; and he can only get peace through these men of no faith and no conscience, who are stifling and destroying everything. Magnitsky and Arakcheev, and *tutti quanti*... You will admit that if you did not look after your property yourself, and only asked for peace and quiet, the crueller your bailiffs were, the more readily you would attain your object," he said, turning to Nikolai.

"Well, but was it the drift of all this?" said Nikolai.

"Why, everything is going to ruin. Bribery in the law-courts, in the army nothing but flogging, endless drill, military settlements¹—people are being tortured; and enlightenment is suppressed. Everything youthful and honourable—they are crushing! Everybody sees that it can't go on like this. The strain is too great, and the string must snap," said Pierre (as men always do say, looking into the working of any government so long as governments have existed)... "While you stand waiting for the string to snap every moment; while everyone is expecting the

¹ A version somewhat more accurate than in the translation accepted as standard here—Ed.

inevitable revolution, as many people as possible should join hands as closely as they can to withstand the general catastrophe. All the youth and energy is being drawn away and dissipated. One lured by women, another by honours, a third by display or money they are all going over to the wrong side. As for independent, honest men, like you and me there are none of them left. I say: enlarge the scope of the society: let the *mot d'orde* be not virtue only, but independence and action."

By that time, Tolstoy had read a number of works written by the Decembrists themselves: he had copies of Herzen's publications, and sometimes the legal press published the memoirs and political essays of Bestuzhev, Trubetskoy, Lunin, Fonvisin, Pushkin and—the most valuable of all (in particular for the history of early Decembrist societies)—the notes of Yakushkin. We know from T.A. Kuzminskaya, for example, that during his stay in Moscow in December 1863, Tolstoy 'searched for various memoirs and novels in which mention was made of the Decembrists'.

Futhermore, the author of *War and Peace* had met those Decembrists who had returned, had talked with them, knew many of their contemporaries, and also had help and information from a great expert on this issue, Pyotr Ivanovich Bartenev who published the journal *Russian Archives*. Indeed, Tolstoy himself was born only two years after the trial and the executions.

Pierre addresses his close companions while maintaining a certain distance and secrecy. To be sure, when speaking of the situation in the country he speaks openly, hiding nothing ('everything is going to ruin')—but about the transition to 'independence and action' he speaks cautiously, carefully selecting his words for the uninitiated listener.

The author intervenes only twice—but how!—in the speech pronounced by Pyotr Kirillovich. One such intervention is the comment 'mysticism Pierre could not forgive in anybody now', and the second—'as men always do say... is long as governments have existed.'

A smile, a touch of irony, a reminder that Pierre was himself once a dedicated mason-mystic, but now finds mysticism unpardonable... Originally Tolstoy had included a lengthier ironic commentary (later removed) about those who 'wrote, read and spoke about projects, wanted to test, destroy, alter everything, and all the Russians as one man were full of indescribable enthusiasm. This situation occurred twice in Russia in the 19th century: 'the first time in 1812, when we thrashed Napoleon I and the second time in 1856, when Napoleon III thrashed us.'

So Tolstoy reminds us that his hero had once said something similar, as we can see if we compare Bezukhov's speech made on 5 December 1820, with his speech to the Masons in the summer of 1809.

1809:

'It is not enough to guard our secrets in the seclusion of the lodge,—what is needed is to act... to act... We are falling into slumber and we need to act.'

1820:

'Zeal in educational and philanthropic work is all very good of course. Their object is excellent and all the rest of it; but in the present circumstances what is wanted is something else.'

1809:

'Only then will our order obtain the power insensibly to tie the hands of the promoters of disorder, and to control them without their being aware of it... This aim (the triumph of virtue over vice) is that of Christianity itself.'

In 1820 we find similar ideas and expressions occurring as the dispute continues.

"But action with what object?" he (Nikolai—Tr.) cried. "And what attitude do you take to the government?"

"Why, the attitude of supporters! The society will perhaps not even be a secret one, if the government will allow it. So far from being hostile to the government, we are the real conservatives. It is a society of *gentlemen*, in the full significance of the word. It is simply to prevent Pugachov from coming to massacre my children and yours, to prevent Arakcheev from transporting me to a military settlement, that we are joining hands, with the sole object of the common welfare and security."

"Yes, but it's a secret society, and consequently a hostile and mischievous society, which can only lead to evil."

"Why so? Did the *Tugend-bund*, which saved Europe" (people did not yet venture to believe that Russia had saved Europe) "lead to evil? A *Tugend-bund* is an alliance of virtue; it is love and mutual help; it is what Christ preached on the cross."

Eleven years previously, a 'Union of the Just' had been a fairly abstract idea; now there is to be a secret society directed against Arakcheev and Pugachov: the latter, that is, the leader of a peasant revolt, did indeed frighten the Decembrists, but nonetheless emphasis was on the all-powerful minister, Arakcheev. Pierre tries to make his idea more acceptable to Nikolai Rostov by referring to peasant revolt, to 'gentlemen' and the *Tugend-bund*, but this camou-

flage deceives no one. Nikolai Rostov still grasps the essential meaning: 'Yes, but it's a Secret Society, and consequently a hostile and mischievous society which can only lead to evil.'

And Denisov stokes up the fire:

'Well, my boy, that's all very well for the sausage-eaters—a *Tugend-bund*—but I don't understand it, and I can't even pronounce it... Everything's rotten and corrupt; I agree there; only your *Tugend-bund* I don't understand, but if one is dissatisfied—a *bunt* now' /i.e. a riot or mutiny/, '*Je suis votre homme*'!"

According to an anecdote that has come down to us, Denis Davydov replied to one of his relatives, the Decembrist Vasili Davydov, who suggested that he join a Secret Society 'similar to the German *Tugend-bund*': "That's enough, Vasili Lvovich. I don't understand it, old chap; if there is to be a revolt, then let it be a Russian *bunt*—that, at least, goes on the rampage for a while, and then it's over. But in a German revolt—there's not even a real rampage, just general confusion. I'm telling you straight that I will help to put it down." It is extremely interesting to note that Tolstoy divided the reply given by Davydov (prepared both to revolt and to put down revolt) between Denisov and his opponent, Nikolai Rostov: the latter is ready to put down what the former is inclined to support.

Let us leave this most interesting argument for a moment. Has Pierre indeed returned to his old ideas? And this after the horrors of captivity, after Karataev, when it seemed he had rejected masonry and philanthropy, 'and it was just this absence of an object that gave him that complete and joyful sense of freedom that at this time made his happiness'.

'At this time'. And has he since come round full circle? A new, fourth cycle of cognition.

The first cycle, the fourth...

The first cycle did not involve great suffering—the two worst events were the duel with Dolokhov and the break with Helene.

The second cycle was a long one and brought happiness—but leaving it was a protracted, depressing and oppressive process.

The third cycle was frightening—constantly on the brink of death.

The fourth, judging by the indications, will be even more dreadful, and will last longer—about thirty years.

But perhaps a 'secret society' is as simple and natural a necessity as doing good, as finding the exact words

and actions; and this came to Bezukhov following captivity and his meeting with Karataev.

Perhaps Prince Fyodor and the *Tugend-bund* are as natural as eating, breathing, talking?

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy does not think so. His ironic, casual remarks, and the more detailed objections found in his rough draft, cannot be taken to mean that Tolstoy is angry with Pierre, that Pierre, in the author's opinion, is wrong. However, Nikolai Rostov is also right: 'God forbid,' he said to Pierre, who wished to inspire him with virtue.

Tolstoy, it seems, is of the opinion that Pierre was more correct at the end of 1812; but at that time he lived like a flower or a bird among the people, was himself one of the people: he had no choice.

Now, however, his wealth and his social position have returned and, in Tolstoy's opinion, he is already outside, above the people—yet is therefore free to choose. And a little later, when the argument is over, he speaks ironically of Nikolai Rostov, who has collected a library of serious literature, but who lacks freedom of thought.

Natasha: 'So you say ideas to him are not serious?'

Pierre: 'Yes, and to me nothing else is serious. All the while I was in Petersburg, I seemed to be seeing everyone in a dream. When I am absorbed by an idea, nothing else is serious.'

In fact, at this moment, when the Supreme Criminal Court of 1826 still lies years into the future, Pierre is already pronouncing sentence on himself and his family; Nikolai Rostov is more like the Pierre of yesterday than is Pierre himself; Bezukhov is arguing not so much with his brother-in-law as with himself!

'Yes,' said Pierre, and he went on with what interested him. 'Nikolai says we ought not to think. But I can't help it'.

Meanwhile Nikolai is talking to the princess Maria: 'Why, what concern is all that of mine—Arakcheev's misdoings and all the rest of it—what concern was it of mine, when at the time of our marriage I had so many debts that they were going to put me in prison, and a mother who couldn't see it or understand it. And then you, and the children, and my work.'

Natasha does not analyse these ideas, does not see the future her husband's words imply; she is full of admiration for what her husband is saying, but subconsciously, intuitively, she senses the true meaning of the argument and asks a question which seems to be unrelated to their conversation so far:

"Do you know what I am thinking about?" she said. "About

Platon Karataev. What would he have said? Would he have approved of you now?"

"Pierre was not in the least surprised at this question. He understood the connection of his wife's ideas.

"Platon Karataev?" he said, and he pondered, evidently trying sincerely to picture what Karataev's judgement would have been on the subject. "He would not have understood, and yet, perhaps, he would."

"I like you awfully!" said Natasha all at once. "Awfully, awfully!"

"No, he wouldn't have approved", said Pierre, musing. "What he would have approved of is our home life. He did so like to see seemliness, happiness, peace in everything, and I could have shown him all of us with pride."

No, he wouldn't have approved—he would have approved...

Like Tolstoy himself, who all his life, in his attitude to the Decembrists (and in dozens of other everyday, human and historical problems) sought to establish his measure of approval and disapproval... Often it seemed to him that he had found it: violence should be avoided, noble aims should not be paid for in blood. Using this measure, Pierre (and the Myravyovs, Yakushkin, Lunin and many others)—do not receive his approval. Yet they are fine people. Fifty years later the author will say to Makovitsky: 'The Decembrists were the best people society had to offer—as if a magnet had been passed over a pile of rubbish containing iron filings, and the filings had been drawn out.'

The best people! Is this not, for Tolstoy, of itself an indication that they were right? (Again—their aim—or their means?)

The Kuragins, Drubetskoys, Sherers, Arakcheevs, Magnitskys and Rostopchins are all far worse people than Pierre, repeatedly pilloried throughout the four volumes, as unattractive characters. And if, suddenly, the author's beloved Bezukhov does something of which the author disapproves, if he decides to join forces with other Bezukhovs against those repellent characters (although, perhaps, he does not yet see the risk, or conceals from his family the way things are moving)—what attitude should one take?

Now it is Bezukhov's relative and friend, Nikolai Rostov, who speaks:

"Well, let me tell you," he said, getting up and nervously setting his pipe down in the corner, and then flinging it away; "I can't prove it to you. You say everything is all rotten, and there will be a revolution; I don't see it; but you say our oath of Allegiance is a conditional thing, and as to that, let me tell you, you are my greatest

friend, you know that, but you make a Secret Society, you begin working against the government—whatever it may be, I know it's my duty to obey it. And if Arakcheev bids me march against you with a squadron and cut you down, I shan't hesitate for a second, I shall go. And then you may think what you like about it"...

'When they all got up to go in to supper, Nikolinka Bolkonsky went up to Pierre with a pale face and shining, luminous eyes. "Uncle Pierre ... you ... no ... If papa had been alive ... would he have been on your side?" he asked.

Pierre saw in a flash all the original, complicated and violent travail of thought and feeling that must have been going on independently in this boy during the conversation. And recalling all he had been saying, he felt vexed that the boy should have heard him. He had to answer him, however.

"I believe he would," he said reluctantly, and he went out of the study.'

5 December 1820. The completeness of the novel creates the illusion that the lives of the main heroes are also complete. But this would be a mistake.

There are still 5 years and 9 days to that other December, but the main participants are already visible.

The Rostovs, the Bolkonskys, the Bezukhovs, those 'who are hanged', and those 'who hang'—the famous aphorism of Mikhail Muravyov (nicknamed 'the hanger': 'I belong not to the Muravyovs who are hanged, but to those who hang') reflected a situation that was common in 1825: most of the condemned Decembrists had high-ranking relatives, General Nabokov, the husband of Pushchin's beloved sister, was the chairman of one of the courts that tried those involved in the Chernigovsky mutiny, but this did not prevent him, while remaining within the bounds of the nobleman's concept of honour, from helping in every way he could and always adding some kind words on behalf of his condemned relative.

I. M. Bibikov, a close relative and friend of the Muravyov-Apostols, figured prominently in the St Petersburg inquiry into the events of 14 December, while his son, Mikhail Bibikov, will, as was mentioned earlier, marry the daughter of Nikita Muravyov, and the family will preserve mementoes of the Decembrists and the memory of those who were exiled or executed (a few years later, Lev Tolstoy will make the acquaintance of this family).

It is hardly likely that, in 1825, Nikolai Rostov would have to march against Pierre and 'cut him down'—he has already retired. However, cursing and swearing, he would plead for clemency on behalf of his brother-in-law, send

him money and parcels and, together with the princess Maria, help Natasha off on the long journey to the mines beyond lake Baikal.

And side by side with them there is another character who will almost certainly be involved in the future rebellion—Nikolinka Bolkonsky.

'Next summer I shall take him to Petersburg,' says Nikolai, hoping that 'it will be good for him to mix with society'.

St Petersburg evidently means military service—but this is only adding fuel to the fire! His uncle does not even suspect that he himself is drawing his nephew closer to the evil he wishes to remove him from.

The 15-year-old Nikolinka sees a prophetic dream (as once did his uncle Pierre in Mozhaïsk):

'In his dream his Uncle Pierre and he in helmets, such as appeared in the illustrations in his Plutarch, were marching at the head of an immense army. This army was made up of slanting, white threads that filled the air like those spiderwebs that float in autumn...

'Ahead of them was glory, which was something like those threads too, only somewhat more opaque. They—he and Pierre—were flying lightly and happily nearer and nearer their goal. All at once the threads that moved them seemed to grow weak and tangled; and it was all difficult. And Uncle Nikolai stood before them in a stern and menacing attitude.

"Have you done this?" he said, pointing to broken pens and sticks of sealing wax. "I did love you, but Arakcheev has bidden me, and I will kill the first that moves forward."

"I will do it," the boy thinks. "Whatever he might tell me, I will do it. Mucius Scaevola burnt his hand. But why should the same sort of thing not happen in my life? I know they want me to study. And I am going to study. But some day I shall have finished, and then I will act. One thing only I pray God for, that the same sort of thing may happen with me as with Plutarch's men, and I will act in the same way. I will do more. Everyone shall know of me, shall love me, and admire me."

Who are they, Pyotr Kirillovich Bezukhov, Nikolai Andreyevich Bolkonsky junior?

We repeat yet again: we should not look for prototypes, we must remember that the author had a considerable number of written and oral sources of information, and also possessed a gift which, it seems, enabled him to guess, indeed deduce, the character portraits of historical figures who were almost unknown to him, and whom he

could not paint from life (Tolstoy acquired most of his detailed and comprehensive knowledge of unpublished material and oral accounts by the Decembrists themselves only several years after the novel was completed).

Pierre belongs to the group of older Decembrists: he is thirty-five years old, and at the time of the uprising he will be forty, about the same age as Volkonsky, Lunin, Fonvisin and Vladimir Steingel. Indeed, he is not unlike Steingel in appearance, for both are rather plump, wear glasses and are civilians. Steingel was a retired lieutenant-colonel (the other older Decembrists were all military men), and, prior to the uprising, had a wife and large family. In 1856, when he returned from Siberia, he was 73 years of age (Pierre would have been 71). When writing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy read Steingel's notes about 1812 and 1813. Steingel, it is true, was not wealthy, and was born in Siberia. If one were to try to decide which of the Decembrist women Natasha most closely resembles, then it would probably be Trubetskaya. However, even if we were to take something from each Decembrist, we still could not build up Pierre—and yet they have a great deal, a very great deal, in common.

Nor must we forget the hero of the first chapter of the unfinished novel *The Decembrists*, who returned from exile in 1856.

Pierre and Natasha are the names of a 'former prince' amnestied in 1856 ('We shall call him Labazov') and his wife, they cause a commotion in Moscow, which they left 30 years previously, and the old, somewhat comical Decembrist remembers a very different city.

Labazov's biography up to 1825 is, of course, different from that of Bezukhov: Pierre (Pyotr Ivanovich) was in the army, and married Natalya Nikolayevna Krinskaya only a few months before the uprising. However, prior to the uprising he was a member of a masonic lodge, and the family relationships seem familiar—possibly much of this would have been retained in a continuation of *War and Peace*.

However, there was to be no continuation, although the idea of writing a novel about the Decembrists continued to haunt Lev Nikolayevich to the end of his days.

The elderly prince Pyotr and the young count Pierre move towards each other, but never actually meet.

Nikolinka, on the other hand, seems to be modelled from the enthusiastic, exalted Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin; or from the youngest of the Decembrists—Ippolit Muravyov-Apostol: he was the same age as Nikolinka, also born in 1806; he also loved to read Plutarch, was dispatched to

St Petersburg at an early age, dreamed of a life resembling that of the heroes of Plutarch, and created just such a biography for himself with his own youthful hands. Let us recall how Ippolit, at the age of 19, rushes to the south to join the insurgents of the Chernigovsky regiment, how he refuses to abandon a lost cause, vows to win or to die, and how, in the final battle, having witnessed the death of his dear ones and of the cause they are fighting for, kills himself and his body is thrown into a common grave beneath a mound of earth that soon disappears without trace.

Finally, Nikolinka is also very similar to Alexander Ivanovich Odoevsky, who exclaims 'Oh, how splendidly we shall die!'

Nikolinka Bolkonsky surely stakes his head.

Bestuzhev-Riumin, Ippolit Muravyov-Apostol, Alexander Odoevsky stake theirs.

In Siberia, Pierre would remember the comforting words of Karataev about the supreme justice which is certain to manifest itself one day, and he would live simply and with dignity, rediscovering a Karataev-type freedom; once again, perforce, but without bitterness, he would abandon universal problems to concern himself with simple, Siberian, prison-cell affairs and discussions, immersed in that natural, commonfolk life he last came into contact with during his 'Karataev autumn' of 1812. Now, as then, everyone will love him and be infected with his liveliness, and he will help many to bear their burdens. Thirty years later, having returned to Russia with his wife, he would recover his noble rank (but not the title of count), and, time and strength permitting, he would enter upon the fifth cycle of his life, and would once again recall the common cause, would be stirred by the approaching emancipation of the serfs or other important Russian affairs.

And he would once again be right, and at the same time wrong, as he was in the first cycle in the salon of Anna Pavlovna Sherer, and when, growing heated in his debate with Prince Andrei, he asked: 'But how are you living only for yourself?' And in the third cycle, when he interpreted Apocalypse to mean that he must sacrifice himself. And again in the fourth cycle, when he explained why they must 'struggle together, joining hands with the sole object of the common welfare and security'.

However, and most importantly, this constant process of change, search and error means that Pierre never becomes complacent, never stagnates. In this, at least, he is always right, for he is honest. He is right even when he falls into despondency and despair, for without this doubt—

'What is wrong? What is right?' it is impossible to move on from one cycle to the next, and a man who has never known anything of the kind can be dangerous, dishonest, static (even though it seems to him that he is marching unswervingly, invariably forward.)

Tolstoy, with each year more certain of the truth of his convictions, constantly sought and found arguments against himself, driven by the powerful intuition of an artist along the spiral of his long life, which he first approved, then disapproved, then approved once more—and so on to the end of his days...

* * *

Much has been written about the reasons why Tolstoy never finished his novel about the Decembrists: censorship problems, impossibility of gaining access to archive material, and therefore, in the writer's opinion, insufficient knowledge of the subject; finally there is also his periodical disillusionment with the heroes, striving by force, that is, not as Tolstoy would have wished, to alter the world.

The above would also seem to hold true for the end of *War and Peace*: it serves to explain why the author does not continue his story into a later, but less well-known period...

Such arguments could be accepted without hesitation, were it not for the considerable lapse of time between the writing of the last chapters of *War and Peace* (1869) and a return to *The Decembrists* (1877).

At this point it should be remembered that the first pages of *The Decembrists*, written in the early 1860s, precede the first chapters of *War and Peace*: the story and the novel (begun in 1863) are separated only by a very short period of time; the author moves almost directly from one to the other. However, following the epilogue of the novel, there comes a lengthy break difficult to explain and, even after this break, the theme of *The Decembrists* changes considerably, with new characters appearing who have no connection with the now completed novel.

By the end of 1869, Tolstoy clearly had no desire to continue a novel whose subsequent development he had earlier been able to distinguish quite distinctly.

In addition to the difficulties already referred to, let us mention another, one which it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove, but which it is equally impossible to ignore.

In the epilogue of *War and Peace*, Bezukhov is 35 years old.

When he begins the novel, Tolstoy is exactly the same age (and in 1869 he is 41).

Seven years before the period of the epilogue, Bezukhov had made a happy marriage, children were born, and Natasha is still nursing the fourth. Tolstoy, having lived through an emotional crisis in the late 1850s and early 1860s, when, for the first time, he abandoned writing, entered into a happy marriage with Sophia Andreyevna 6 years prior to writing the epilogue, and his son Lev, his fourth child, was born while he was writing it.

The author and his favourite character are leading a similar life, a life that accords with their ideals, peaceful, honourable and simple. This, it would seem, is the moment to summon time to slow down, to stand still... However, the first to trouble the calm is Pierre Bezukhov: he leaves the kindly world of Karataev and Natasha and moves in the direction of social explosion, rebellion and penal servitude.

Given the similarity between the biography of the author and that of his hero, have we not good reason to suspect that in 1869 Lev Tolstoy, too, felt troubled by the premonition that the peaceful cycle in his own life was also coming to an end, and that soon or, even if not very soon, nonetheless unavoidably, circumstances would compel him to make a move... No—not to become a Decembrist (although 50 years earlier he would almost certainly have been involved). Circumstances will compel him to undertake yet another search (just like that of Pierre's) to discover the social meaning of life, to intensify his involvement in personal and public matters, and then—then the crisis of the 80s: the simplification of life, a new religion, the refusal to take money for his own writings, withdrawal...

In 1820 Pierre Bezukhov goes to attend meetings in St Petersburg because in 1869, in Yasnaya Polyana, Lev Tolstoy begins to ponder on his life.

All of this is, of course, supposition, guesswork, a subject that is obscure and intimate. During the years in question the writer made very few notes in his diary. 'In the sombre summer of 1869,' writes Boris Eichenbaum, a leading expert on this question, 'Tolstoy almost fell into madness, showing signs of psychological disturbance... In the autumn of 1871, S. A. Tolstaya wrote to her sister: "Levochka keeps repeating that everything is over for him, that he will soon die, that nothing brings him joy, that

there is nothing more he expects from life."

"Ten years had passed since Tolstoy abandoned writing the first time. He had then travelled a complex, circuitous route via his work at the school he founded, his family and running his estate before, the half-forgotten author of *Childhood* and tales of the Crimean war, he appeared once more before the reader with *War and Peace*. A second rejection of literary work took him back onto the old circuitous route.' These lines by a renowned expert on the life and work of Tolstoy indicate a Bezukhov-type cycle.

This Bezukhovian unrest is very serious. However, it has not yet fully matured, has not yet taken complete possession of the author. It is not yet time for Anna Karenina to throw herself beneath the oncoming train, nor for Father Sergi to retire to a monastery.

For the moment it is only time for Pierre Bezukhov, in the midst of his peaceful happiness, to travel to St Petersburg.

It is still 5 years to 14 December, and much longer to the time when Tolstoy will withdraw from public life, and then leave home. The argument with himself is still not resolved, simply begun anew. Therefore to send Pierre out onto Senate Square and into penal servitude by adding further chapters to *War and Peace* would have meant the author running ahead of himself.

It is still early for Tolstoy to withdraw and leave. And it is impossible to continue *War and Peace*.

A Few Years Later

At the end of the 1870s, the moment had come. Tolstoy had made his choice. Once more he turned to *The Decembrists*—but now the heroes and the ideas were quite different.

And once again there appeared the image of 'dear Sasha', Alexander Odoyevsky.

Lev Tolstoy to the historian and publisher of *Russian Archive*, P. I. Bartenev (around 1 May 1878):

'My dear Pyotr Ivanovich, what are the names and addresses of the children and heirs of Ivan Sergeyevich, Prince Odoyevsky? I will be at home until 2 o'clock, but please write me your answer.'

The same request is put to aunt Alexandra Andreyevna Tolstaya, a maid of honour acquainted with many important and well-informed individuals.

Why does Tolstoy suddenly wish to learn about 'the descendants of Ivan Sergeyevich', that is, the father of

Sasha Odoyevsky?

In order to learn as much as possible about the Decembrist.

Odoyevsky senior had had three daughters by his second marriage, all considerably younger than Alexander Ivanovich (Sophia Ivanovna, married name Maslova, was still alive in 1909!), Tolstoy hoped to discover family documents and hear the family history, but all he received was information about the family tree—the sisters had never seen their elder brother!

Then Anastasia Perfil'yevna, the Decembrist's second cousin, happened to recall something and informed Tolstoy (via her daughter) that Sasha Odoyevsky was 'a tall man, rather thin, with beautiful large blue eyes and chestnut hair. She remembers nothing else, nothing else at all, because she was 12 years old when she saw him.'

Tolstoy's aunt also inquired of important people at court: the minister Adlerberg and the former governor-general of the capital, Suvorov, who had both known Odoyevsky when he was a young man and had served with him: 'Old Adlerberg, unfortunately, is rigidly cautious, and his son is exactly the same. That leaves Suvorov, who, of course, is not possessed of that unpleasant virtue but who, apart from having been a mere boy at the time, is now so deaf that I cannot question him on such a delicate subject during receptions at the palace, which is where we meet.'

Poor Alexander Odoyevsky: it is almost 40 years since illness took him to the grave, yet minister Adlerberg and his son, also a minister, are afraid to remember; it is also awkward to speak the insurgent's name out loud 'in the presence of the Sovereign'.

Tolstoy was not satisfied—but even so he had found out something about the Decembrist: there are the poems of Lermontov, Ogaryov's *Caucasian Waters*, scraps of reminiscences by old companions in exile and other contemporaries of 'dear Sasha': Lev Tolstoy needed him badly for his new novel.

In the rough notes written at the end of the 1870s, Odoyevsky, not the real Odoyevsky, but Tolstoy's Odoyevsky, appears prior to the uprising of 14 December: a life of lordly ease and comfort, only a vague knowledge of the life of the people, of his own peasants who are, moreover, being driven into Siberia by the bailiff on a false and base accusation. Then comes Senate Square, the dungeon, penal servitude. In Siberia the former nobleman meets his own peasants serving out their hard sentence of exile, and he undergoes a moral regeneration.

He develops an interest in religion ('Christian mysticism'), not in the externals, but in 'the kingdom of God that lies within us'.

As far as we know, nothing of the kind happened to the historical Odoyevsky and his peasants (although, of course, can we be sure? Tolstoy had his sources of information, both among those at court and among former exiles, who could tell him many true stories which might appear stranger than fiction—stories which never found their way into any documents).

'For Me It Is the Key...'

Half a century separated Tolstoy from the period he had chosen, but the most important documents (above all the inquiry into the Decembrist affair) lay in the state archives under lock and key. Lev Nikolayevich requested permission to have access to the secret papers of 1825-26, but placed most of his hopes on his own inquiries.

On 8 February 1878, the writer travelled to Moscow to collect some books, and there he visited the ageing Decembrists Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, Belyayev, Svistunov and Zavalishin. He also called upon the daughter of Nikita Muravyov, Sophia Nikitichna Bibikova, who 'told me and showed me a wealth of things'. In her memoirs, the granddaughter of Sophia Nikitichna averred that Sophia 'not only loved her father, but positively adored him, revered his memory and treasured everything that he had managed to teach her'. The house of Sophia Nikitichna was a veritable Decembrist museum, which she showed to Tolstoy, also giving him a large number of books.

Thus the writer began to get an increasingly clear picture of the characters 'from the Decembrist point of view', but the objectivity of a great artist demanded that he understand the other, the punitive point of view of the state.

About that time, in the Moscow conversations of 1878, someone mentioned an important name in St Petersburg circles: Vladimir Vasilyevich Stasov.

The Papers of Nicholas I

As far back as 1856, the director of the Public Library, Modest Andreyevich Korf, introduced the young scholar Stasov into the Committee for the Collection of Materials on the History of the Reign of Emperor Nicholas I. This committee (of which Baron Korf himself was the chairman) had been set up to examine the papers of the late Tsar, prepare an official history of his reign, and send the most secret

documents, which were not for publication, to his son, the reigning Emperor. Stasov was one of the most active and knowledgeable members of the committee (from 1872 he also headed the arts department of the library). After the death of Baron Korf (1876), it fell to Stasov to deal with the main task of sorting the vast quantity of secret material (only a part of which was included in 17 large volumes). Meanwhile the library continued to receive further material and information concerning the previous reign, and these, too, Stasov had to deal with.

Rumours concerning some unknown but important document pertaining to the execution of the five Decembrists reached Moscow and aroused Tolstoy's interest. On 16 March 1878, he wrote to his permanent correspondent and assistant, N. N. Strakhov.

'I would very much like to ask Stasov, as a member of the Committee, etc., of Nicholas I, if he could find out or indicate how the execution of the five was decided upon, who insisted upon it, whether there were any hesitations or discussions between Nicholas and his close advisors.'

Stasov's position was not an easy one. As an official with the rank of general (a state counsellor), he was obliged to protect state secrets and not communicate them to the 'unreliable count'.

However, Stasov, a man active in public life, a thinker, a democrat, and even, Stasov the reader, could not refuse Lev Tolstoy or declare unlawful the wish of such a renowned writer to acquaint himself with original historical documents.

And so, on 31 March 1878, Stasov wrote his first letter to Tolstoy, and a week later Tolstoy wrote back to Stasov.

The situation immediately preceding the exchange of letters is quite easy to elucidate. Tolstoy arrives in St Petersburg and goes to the Public Library in search of interesting material, reliable details concerning 'that era', that is, the times of Pushkin, the Decembrists, Alexander I and the royal favourite, the archimandrite Foti. One of the chief guardians of history makes the acquaintance of the writer and promises to help... To begin with, Stasov sends Tolstoy a letter written by the archimandrite Foti, an influential clergyman at court, (unfortunately the contents of this letter are unknown to this day, it has not been found either among Tolstoy's papers or in the Public Library). However, at the same time something far more important, far more secret is offered—and this is precisely the material so very essential to Lev Nikolayevich.

The Copy of a Copy

V. V. Stasov to Tolstoy

12 April 1878

'I am very happy that the note written by Nicholas, about which I wrote you, will be of use to you. However, I still do not have a copy, and I will not have one before the beginning of May, since the gentleman who now owns the original recently went abroad with his wife.'

Now, many years later, we know who that gentleman was.

Arseni Arkadyevich Golenishchev-Kutuzov. A half-forgotten lyrical poet, according to his contemporaries a likeable and gentle man, very kind-hearted and not very rich. He was an enthusiastic lover of music—the great composer Mussorgsky set his poem *Without Sunlight* to music. Indeed, Mussorgsky and the poet were friends, they lodged together in a cheap hotel and saw each other every day. Kutuzov remembered Mussorgsky's improvisations, became very attached to the musician and did all he could to help him. Naturally, he also knew Mussorgsky's friends. Here we can easily discover the natural connection with Stasov, whose support for and popularization of Mussorgsky's work and that of his friends was well-known. Kutuzov's biographer, writing after the poet's death, made special mention of his close acquaintance with Stasov, 'whose influence led Kutuzov to compose certain of his verses'.

The link between Golenishchev-Kutuzov and Stasov is clear. All that remains to be added is that the poet was the grandson of Pavel Vasilyevich Golenishchev-Kutuzov, and the latter (a very distant relative of the great general) was a man close to Nicholas I: first he was one of the tutors of the young grand prince, then he became the governor-general of St Petersburg in the dreadful months that followed 14 December, and he was a member of the Investigation Committee into the Decembrist affair. It was, as we know, Pavel Golenishchev-Kutuzov (or simply Kutuzov) who was in charge of the execution of the 5 revolutionaries on 13 July 1826. It was to him, that Ryleyev apparently cried out: '*Despicable servant of a tyrant!*'

Time passed. Tolstoy waited impatiently for news from the capital. Finally, on 3 June 1878, Strakhov informed Tolstoy that Stasov 'will hand over his valuable document tomorrow, but asked that total secrecy be maintained'.

Six days later:

9 June 1878

'I do not know how to thank you, Vladimir Vasilyevich, for the document you have sent me. For me it is the key that will open the door not so much to history as to psychology. It is the answer to the main question that has been tormenting me. I am eternally in your debt for this service. As for my discretion, I can give you my word. I have not even shown it to my wife, and have just copied out the document and destroyed the copy written in your hand.'

So, the gentleman in question had returned, and the document had appeared.

Tolstoy has every reason to be excited; it is not, of course, a question of historical detail—he is interested in the power of life and death exercised by one man over another, in the sanctity of life, in good and evil.

Dmitri Obolensky, a man close to Tolstoy and active in public life, related some of the details of this story. The grandson of General Kutuzov did not have the original note written by the Tsar—Stasov was mistaken when he wrote 'the gentleman who owns the original', all he had was a copy! Oh, how Nicholas did not wish that his detailed instructions on the execution ever become public! One may assume that he ordered the document to be destroyed immediately. However, Pavel Kutuzov did not wish to carry all the responsibility for this murderous ritual either, and he made a copy of the Tsar's order, 'just in case'. It was this copy that Stasov received. He then also made a copy and sent it to Lev Nikolayevich with the request not to show it to anyone or speak about it (there can be little doubt that Stasov did not use the post on this occasion, but made use of some reliable opportunity to send it privately).

Tolstoy immediately made a copy of the document, that is, he made what one might call a third-hand copy.

Dmitri Obolensky remembered that Lev Nikolayevich 'read his own copy of the note written by Nikolai Pavlovich (Nicholas I) in which the entire procedure of the execution of the Decembrists was set forth by the Tsar himself in every detail. "This is a kind of refined murder," cried the indignant Tolstoy on reading the note.'

For a long time this third-hand copy was believed to be lost: it was thought that Tolstoy, fearing to compromise Stasov, finally destroyed his own copy also. Thus the copies written in the hands of Tolstoy and Stasov had disappeared, and with them, it seemed, the text of the sinister instructions of the Tsar.

No such document was found in the personal archives of

Nicholas I or among the papers of the main punitive institutions. It appeared that the Tsar had succeeded in concealing from history his direct involvement in drawing up the procedure of execution, hiding behind his famous words 'I agree with the rest' or 'as the court decides'.

However, the document had not disappeared! In 1948 (exactly 70 years after the correspondence between Tolstoy and Stasov on this subject) the copy written by Lev Tolstoy was purchased from a private owner by the State Museum. 'The truth is mightier than the Tsar,' Pushkin wrote not long before he died.

A piece of writing paper, one side covered in writing and carrying the heading 'Signature of Nicholas I (orthography of the original)'.

Here is the text:

'A guard is to be mounted in the crownwork. The troops shall assemble at 3 o'clock. First those condemned to penal servitude and degradation shall be brought out under escort and lined up facing the flag. The escort shall stand behind them, two to each. When everyone is assembled, the order to present arms shall be given, and the drums shall sound the first part of the signal to march. Then the general in command of the squadron and the artillery shall read out the sentence, after which the second part of the signal to march shall be played, followed by the command to shoulder arms. Then the executioners will remove the uniforms and the crosses, break the swords, and throw them all onto a prepared bonfire. When the sentence has been executed, they are to be led back to the crownwork in the same manner as they were led out. Then those condemned to death shall be led up onto the ramparts, accompanied by a priest carrying a cross. The drums will then sound the signal for running the gantlet until all has been completed, after which the troops will wheel about to the right in sections and march past, and then be dismissed.'

Calm and business-like are the instructions issued by the Emperor. Cold-bloodedly he calculated everything down to the last minute, not forgetting one manoeuvre, even designating when and how the drums were to roll (it was not for nothing that he prided himself on his knowledge of parade drill). We have before us a carefully-thought out, detailed and methodical plan for the murder of five young men, full of strength and energy and the desire to serve their country! The 'murder of the five' and the 'civilian death' of more than a hundred more.

V.— V.— Stasov— to— Tolstoy

15 June 1878

'Count Lev Nikolayevich, I am sending you yet another

new document. It is, of course, of less importance than the previous one, but nonetheless very important and interesting, as you will see for yourself. Just as the first document, this one was addressed to Count Golenishchev-Kutuzov, the former "uncle" (tutor) of Nicholas I, at the time the military governor-general of St Petersburg.'

We do not have Tolstoy's reply to this letter, though not to reply would have run counter to his rules of politeness. Therefore it seems most likely that his thanks, either oral or written, were transmitted via a third person.

This means that the 'new document' was also important, secret, dangerous.

Thus, in the summer of 1878, Tolstoy was in possession of two Stasov papers.

As to the second note: it is also about the execution of the Decembrists, and is also from the Tsar to Pavel Golenishchev-Kutuzov.

This second document has not been found. However, it has a bearing on Tolstoy, on Stasov and on the Decembrists. Therefore it must be found!

The State Public Library

The Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, formerly the Imperial Public Library...

A plaque commemorates the more than 50 years that V. V. Stasov served in this, one of the nation's most important archive.

The department of manuscripts where, stored among hundreds of thousands of other documents, the papers of former director Korf, of Stasov, and the 17 volumes of the documents of Nicholas I which they compiled, have been studied over many years. It would be natural that the other, second note concerning the execution would be hidden somewhere amongst them—but it is not. Otherwise it would have been discovered long ago!

And the archives of Governor-General Pavel Vasilyevich Golenishchev-Kutuzov, his children and grandchildren? There is no such archive anywhere in the Soviet Union. Official and informal messages written by the General, a page of poetry written by his grandson, Arseni Arkadyevich, occasionally turn up among documents pertaining to other people. There is only one thing to do—one by one individual files are examined which might contain some reference to General Pavel Vasilyevich Golenishchev-Kutuzov.

A file with the inscription: archive 380, unit 118. On the cover, written in Stasov's handwriting, is a note to the effect that the papers in the file were 'returned by

his Imperial Majesty in St Petersburg on 14 March 1876'. Alexander II read the documents, made a few insignificant comments in the margins in his extremely small handwriting, and returned the documents to the secret archives.

And what lies inside the file? Instructions of every kind issued by the preceding Tsar, Nicholas I, and addressed to various governor-generals of St Petersburg.

Once you begin to read, it is almost impossible to stop. How splendidly the imperial hand could sometimes couch its instructions! There are times when one has the impression that these are not real documents, but extracts from some celebrated piece of prose.

In one document, for example, the governor-general informs Nicholas that the carriage carrying his daughter almost overturned, although the horses were excellent and the driver experienced. Result of the inquiry: 'No one was able to explain the reason for the unexpected behaviour of the horses, but it must be assumed that the horses turned off to the side through the habit the drivers have of stopping at the tavern in front of which the unfortunate incident occurred.'

Following upon this comes the brilliant resolution written in the Emperor's own hand: 'Forbid the drivers to stop at taverns on their way back. 8 June 1843.'

No doubt the Tsar remained convinced that, after 8 June 1843, not a single driver ever so much as glanced into a drinking place again!

However, Nicholas did sometimes admit that individual flaws and failings are difficult to correct. When he is informed that a certain Schroeder, a retired privy councillor (a very high-ranking and respected position!) had appeared in the Obukhovskiy hospital (for the commoners) 'seeking refuge from his wife, who is occasionally seized by fits of insanity', the Tsar condescended to inquire: 'Is there a respectable separate room for Mr Schroeder, for I do not remember seeing such rooms in a hospital?' The Tsar took pride in the fact that he looked into every detail, however minute, presumably in the belief that this is what constitutes statesmanship. He ordered, for example, that the inordinately high prices on coffins be reduced, and took an interest in one lady's domestic serfs who had committed an offence.

A variety of documents, a variety of signatures—governor-generals succeeded one another in the capital. However, the single largest number of documents concern precisely the man we are interested in—Pavel Vasilyevich Golenishchev-Kutuzov. To start with there are a few friendly notes written by the young grand prince Nicholas to his

tutor, 'uncle' Golenishchev-Kutuzov. Then come papers pertaining to 1826.

The main purpose of our search is to find the note or notes written by Nicholas I on the subject of the execution, and it is clear that there is no such note in unit 118.

Soon the letters from Nicholas I to General Kutuzov come to an end. This correspondence *must* have included the two messages already mentioned regarding the conduct of the execution, but they were not the kind of instruction to be filed along with the rest.

Let us continue our pursuit of the rather unpleasant governor-general in other archives.

Here is the well-known short report on the execution sent by Golenishchev-Kutuzov to Nicholas I and long-since published.

'The execution ended in a proper atmosphere of calm and order both among the assembled troops and among the spectators, who were not numerous... Ryleyev, Kakhovsky and Muravyov fell from the gallows, but were soon hanged again and met their deserved death. About which I have the honour humbly to report to Your Imperial Majesty.'

This document was published many years later, in 1906. Perhaps Tolstoy had seen it? However, on 15 June 1878, Stasov was clearly sending the writer some other document—not from Kutuzov to the Tsar, but from the Tsar to Kutuzov. Once again we leaf through the list of manuscript archives: it is still the most logical thing to search here, among documents connected with Stasov.

The general's name appears among the papers of D. I. Lobanov-Rostovsky. That is interesting. Who is this Lobanov-Rostovsky? He was Minister of Justice and one of the leading figures in the trial and execution of the five Decembrists.

One executioner is writing to another.

A thick book in a green cover with a red rectangle in the middle is entitled 'Imperial Letters, Decrees, Rescripts and Orders addressed to Pr. Dm. Iv. Lobanov-Rostovsky. From 1820 to 1828.'

There is material of every possible kind in this volume: rescripts from two tsars pertaining to the replacement of officials and to peasant uprisings; towards the end of December 1825, there is an order from his Imperial Majesty that Senior Procurator Krasnokutsky and the official Pavlov be sent under the escort of a gendarme officer—arrests are already being made in connection with the Decembrist affair. The senior procurator turns out to be a prominent member of the Secret Society, he will be sent to Siberia, from where he will never return. Pavlov, however, is re-

leased after a short period under arrest.

This volume repeatedly confirms that Lobanov-Rostovsky played a sinister role during the inquiry and trial. And, indeed, he was suited to this role for he was notorious even before the uprising. It was to Prince Dmitri Ivanovich and his brother, a member of the State Council, that Pushkin addressed his epigramme:

*You, advocates of knout and noose,
Illustrious Princes...*

Between 1826 and 1827 the Minister of Justice tried and sentenced with energy and speed, thereby earning the special gratitude of Nicholas I, who noted that in 1826 'an unusual number of cases, amounting to more than 2,850,000 were being examined across the country.

Four pages earlier we find something of particular interest and having a direct link with our story.

A New Document

'St Petersburg. 12 July 1826.

'Adjutant-General Golenishchev-Kutuzov has just been to see me and, in accord with the will of your Imperial Majesty, requested my opinion regarding the proposed additional gallows under which are to be displayed the names of those state criminals who, by your clemency, are to be reprieved and sentenced to penal servitude.

'In complying as a loyal subject with the will of Your Imperial Majesty, I presume to suggest that, as your merciful sentence was duly read to all the criminals two hours ago, in my opinion it would not be fitting to add to or to increase that sentence, all the more so as the display of the names of the criminals beneath the gallows would only add to the suffering of those noble families to which the criminals unhappily belonged.

'General, Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky.

Here, in pencil, in the handwriting of Nicholas I: 'I agree with your opinion, which fact I wish to be made known to Adjutant-General Kutuzov.'

The next page in the Lobanov file carries a continuation of the story:

'Adjutant-General G.-Kutuzov expresses his profound respect to his highness, Prince Dmitri Ivanovich, and has the honour to inform him that he has read the Imperial confirmation in the note presented by his highness. 'Adjutant-General G.-Kutuzov.

'12 July 1826'.

(13 crossed out).

To begin with, the general mistakenly wrote (and immediately crossed out) '13'—perhaps because all the conversations, fears and anticipations of those at the top were centred on the 13th—the day of the execution.

On reading the whole of this macabre correspondence, the following becomes clear.

There was a note from Nicholas I, which went via Golenishchev-Kutuzov to the Minister of Justice for consultation.

All of this happened on 12 July 1826, two hours after the sentence had been read out. Some of the memoirs written by Decembrists have preserved the story of how the sentence was read out to them.

In the fortress, in the house of the commandant, members of the Supreme Criminal Court, the Archbishop of St Petersburg, members of the State Council, generals, senators, and also the 'Minister of Justice wearing his Order of St Andrew' (that is, Lobanov-Rostovsky himself) gathered together.

According to the Decembrist V. I. Steingel, the Decembrists, having been brought in according to the 'category of the offence', 'embraced and kissed each other as people risen from the grave, asking, "What does all this mean?" Those who knew explained that the sentences were to be read out. "What, have we been tried?"—"Yes!" came the answer.

'In the room next door was the archpriest Pyotr Myslovsky, the general spiritual advisor and confessor; with him were a doctor and two barbers with preparations for blood-letting. Their humane assistance was not required: all proved to be equal to the blow. During the reading of the sentence no pity was visible among the members of the Supreme Court, only curiosity. Some squinted through their lorgnettes, looking at us as if we were animals. It is easy to imagine the feelings this aroused among the condemned.'

Perhaps it was precisely this cheerful courage and dignity on the part of the condemned that caused Nicholas I to think that the sentence was inadequate.

We do not have the document written by Nicholas and given by Kutuzov to Lobanov-Rostovsky. However, there can be no doubt that it is the same as the one which Stasov sent to Tolstoy. We cannot read it, but we can try to reconstruct it on the basis of the answer sent by Lobanov-Rostovsky.

The document is truly unique.

The Tsar is worried lest there be 'unforeseen disturbances' during the execution. At the same time, he yearns for

revenge. He has decided upon the procedure but is disturbed by the idea that the punishment for those condemned to penal servitude and exile is insufficient. Hence the idea of a second gallows.

Even Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, who has seen many things in his life, is shocked, and the Tsar himself is uncertain, otherwise he would not have consulted the minister. He could, after all, simply order that it be done! Although Russian courts had long since become arbitrary and unjust, to add further punishment to a sentence which has already been pronounced, is, in the opinion of the Minister of Justice, a risky action. Two hours previously the Decembrists had been told that they would be 'publicly dishonoured': they would be degraded, their uniforms would be burned, and they would be stripped of titles and honours—and now it seems that this is not enough for Nicholas; he needs gallows with names. And what are the names that are to be fastened to this gallows? Trubetskoy, Volkonsky, Shakhovskoy, Odoyevsky—ancient noble and royal names.

Lobanov-Rostovsky is of the opinion that this would be going too far. He advises against it in the interests of the Tsar himself. As we have already seen, the minister communicates his opinion to Golenishchev-Kutuzov, who signs upon receipt of the document.

Thus at least two people knew about the Tsar's secret desire to have a second gallows: Golenishchev-Kutuzov and Lobanov-Rostovsky. As was his custom, Kutuzov made a copy, and it seems very likely that this document passed via that same grandson, Arseni Arkadyevich, and then Stasov, to Tolstoy.

Consequently, both Stasov and Tolstoy knew yet one more gruesome detail of those last days prior to the sentencing and execution—knew about the second gallows that almost was.

What did Tolstoy gain from his knowledge of this situation? In his rough notes written at the end of the summer of 1878, the writer seems to be directing his attack against Lobanov-Rostovsky: 'Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky—the plump bachelor'. However, it is not, of course, a question of individual references to individual characters. Let us return once again to Tolstoy's words: 'the key to the door, not so much of history as of psychology': the idea of a 'second gallows', like the procedure of the execution, is the key to the true character of the Tsar and an important episode in the life and destiny of the young Odoyevsky. It leaves a powerful and indelible impression on Alexander Ivanovich,

and then comes the meeting with the peasants in Siberia.

Whether anything similar would, or would not, have happened to the real Odoyevsky does not really matter. It could have happened! What is important to Tolstoy is the general character of this kind, gentle man who paid with his health and his life for his moral regeneration.

The second edition of *The Decembrists*, the novel 'about Odoyevsky', also remained unfinished. The reasons for this were many and complex: one of them was a lack of original material, closed archives to which the writer was not allowed access. However, we will not discuss this for the moment. Let us note only that Tolstoy, separated from his hero by two generations, still fell under Odoyevsky's charm; the 'private from the state criminals' Alexander Odoyevsky, was clearly a good man.

Who can tell how much of the ethereal Odoyevsky was captured by the pen and ink of Lev Nikolayevich?

I Have Recalled...

While, in Yasnaya Polyana, Lev Tolstoy was thinking about his Odoyevsky, the aged Ogaryov, then living near London, once more returned to his favourite character.

Herzen is no longer on this earth, his life has been lived—whether well or badly, the future will judge.

*The word of truth in this world is repeated,
The deed of truth in this world is completed,
But this will not bring a rebirth
To us, who lie deep'neath the earth.*

Much of Ogaryov's life already lies behind him: childhood, the vow sworn with Herzen on Vorobyovy Hills to dedicate the whole of their lives to the cause of freedom; then exile, the Caucasus and Odoyevsky, an unhappy marriage, the salons of Moscow, travels, emigration, the free Russian press in London and Geneva, once again a waning of public interest in social questions in Russia, years of poverty and sickness.

Then suddenly, in one of his last poetic farewells, there appears a distant, but obviously not forgotten image: once again the Odoyevsky who appeared 40 years earlier, in the Caucasus.

Where has he come from? Why?

While listening to Beethoven's *Heroic Symphony*, Ogaryov, on the basis of a logic which superficially appears strange, but is psychologically quite understandable, remembers the genuine hero, his hero, so unlike the accepted models of heroism:

*I hear you, solemn sounds: you pay no tribute
 To war and to its knights; you speak to me
 Of daring men who fought and died like martyrs
 To set their homeland and her people free;
 I see those five—I see them on the gallows,
 The calm of death upon their brows; I see
 Their friends and comrades, those who died in prison,
 Of spirit firm, in silent dignity.
 Those solemn sounds fall on my ear, presaging
 Death's feared and pitiless approach, and I
 Regret that for the cause I longed to forward,
 A martyr like them I'm not meant to die.¹*

Under the title *The Heroic Symphony*, an inscription reads: 'In Memory of Al. Odoyevsky'.

People from different worlds—Ogaryov is a man of the approaching 1880s, while Odoyevsky did not live to see 1840: The poem *The Heroic Symphony* resembles that vow that was once made with Herzen on Vorobyovy Hills.

A vow to do what? To struggle, not to surrender?

Yes—but also not to be brutalised by the struggle, but to remain noble and free, for otherwise there is no point in struggling—indeed, it would be wrong to struggle!

The last words of gratitude from a revolutionary, a socialist, an atheist, to the eccentric, gentle, religious, weary Odoyevsky.

The grave claims the last of those who remembered 'dear Shasha', who had directly experienced his unforgettable charm.

At about the same time, the first public acknowledgements begin. In 1883 the now elderly Decembrist, Rosen, finally, after half a century, discharges a duty to his beloved friend and publishes in Russia the first collection of his verse.

1900—Odoyevsky's epigraph 'The spark will light a flame' appears in the title of Lenin's newspaper *The Spark*.

1910—Odoyevsky's *Reply* addressed to Pushkin is published in Russia for the first time unabridged:

*Tyrants will tremble on their thrones,
 The people breath once more.*

1934—the first (but, of course, by no means the last) Soviet complete edition of the works of Alexander Ivanovich appears in print.

¹ Tr. by Irina Zheleznova.

Posthumous fame, recognition, publication and repeat editions, stories, verses and notes written about him by the best of people: posthumous fame, as a revolutionary and as a writer.

Yet it would be a pity if, despite this posthumous fame, Odoyevsky's ethereal footsteps were to be forgotten, if

*...like cloudlets wrought
Of water drops: with the descent of even
They gleam and vanish...*

6

Through the Silence



The age of the Decembrists was drawing to a close: there were fewer and fewer living eye-witnesses, more and more stories, memoirs, unfading memories, yet nonetheless, Lev Tolstoy provides an example of how difficult it was to get at the truth.

As far back as 1841, the arrest of Lunin had led to the destruction of several Decembrist memoirs already in the process of being written. Most were written only after the amnesty in 1856, only a few were written earlier.

The government possessed secret Decembrist documents, the Decembrists possessed secret memories. However, there was a third, very narrow path leading to the truth—well-informed sympathisers.

Most of those who sympathised with the Decembrist movement, from youths such as Herzen to friends like Pushkin, had almost no sources of information except official documents, the stories recounted by the few survivors, occasional news arriving by chance from Siberia, rumour... Most of those who were well-informed about the events were high-ranking officials, and it was, of course, rare that knowledge of the events of 14 December coincided with that feeling of sympathy which compelled the sympathiser to take up his pen. Yet this was what happened in the case of two officials who sat on the Investigation Committee—Alexander Borovkov and Andrei Ivanovsky, who had been on friendly terms with many of the Decembrists and were not indifferent to their fate. The first secretly wrote rather sympathetic notes about those under investigation, and these notes were published towards the end of the 19th century; the second removed from the files and preserved dozens of papers that were of value to Russian culture—the letters of Ryleyev, Griboyedov, Pushkin.

But all this is secret, underground work. For decades the only document about the events of 1825-26 which Russian subjects were permitted to read was the official Report of the Investigation Committee, which said nothing about the most important thing of all—about the conspirators' plans to emancipate the serfs, introduce a constitution, reduce the length of military service and curb the appetites of state officials. Nonetheless, even in its published form the Report frightened the authorities and it was not re-issued so as not to remind the public of these 'state criminals'.

'The Report of the Investigation Committee,' Herzen wrote later, 'is sinking into oblivion, it is difficult to obtain a copy in Russia.' This document, in the opinion of Iskander (Herzen's nom-de-plume), had to be 'presented to the younger generation'. 'Let them look at these strong and powerful personalities, even as seen through the dark hearts of their persecutors and judges, and let them ask themselves what kind of people they were, if even such painters could not, despite all their efforts, distort their noble features.'

The history of his own accession to the throne occupied the greater part of the memoirs begun by Nicholas I himself, but they were written in the greatest secrecy. At the same time, the lack of any published historical research into the events of 1825 seemed to cast a shadow over the beginning of his reign: secrecy, however useful it may be to the despot, always brings with it problems. It was decided to resolve the matter by preparing some historical materials which the Tsar could approve as the version to be presented to future generations.

This was the background to the appearance of the book written by the State-Secretary, Baron Modest Korf, *The Accession to the Throne of Emperor Nicholas I*.

Given the existence of bureaucratic secrecy, the role of specialists such as Korf increased tremendously. A school-fellow of Pushkin (and also of the Decembrists Pushchin and Kuhelbeker) at the Lyceum in Tsarskoye Selo, M. A. Korf made a brilliant career for himself thanks to his loyal, establishment mode of thinking, and also thanks to his excellent knowledge of state institutions and 'secret history'. Not long before his death, Pushkin consulted with him over his research into the history of Peter the Great. So lengthy was the list of unknown material which Korf sent to him that Pushkin was full of admiring astonishment. 'The parcel you sent me yesterday,' wrote the poet on 14 October 1836, 'is invaluable to me in every respect, and will remain for me a memorable event. Indeed, I regret that state service has deprived us of a historian. I cannot hope to replace you... What a field for research is offered by this recent Russian history! And when you think that it has still not been investigated...'

Later Korf was to initiate and write several historical works born of his monopoly on inaccessible documents about the past. The identification and collection of various books and manuscripts about Russia, as well as his later work as the director of the Public Library was, of course, of benefit to historical science. His

collection of foreign literature about Russia, the Russology of the Public Library, is also invaluable assistance to the modern historian and philologist. However, the very monopoly that Korf (and other government officials) enjoyed over important historical material led to a tendentious distortion of events, even if this was achieved mainly by omitting important facts.

In the introduction to his work, Korf gave a brief description of the history of his book and the sources he had used. Expressing himself in typically official terms, he declared that he was seeking 'to establish the true facts, and at the same time to fill in for the future historian of Russia a gap for which our descendants would not forgive us.' Korf argued the necessity of a book such as his by pointing out that foreigners, when speaking of Russia, often make mistakes, even when they seek to be accurate, while Russian writers are restricted by the conditions imposed by a censorship which is as essential as it is beneficent in our social system. Moreover, when it comes to political events, private individuals often know only the superficial aspect, the external characteristics and visible appearance of things, what affects them, so to speak, whereas in affairs of this kind the chief interest is often concentrated in their secret causes and in the totality of all the information in its general import. Finally, there are details which, hidden in unpublished state documents or preserved in the personal memories of those who were involved, are inaccessible to the mass of people.'

It is worth noting that these introductory lines, as much else that was written by Korf, were sharply criticised later by Herzen and Ogaryov, who noted the servile tone and justification of censorship.

Korf divided his main sources into 10 categories (1848), and then added a further 7 in 1854. He based himself on the reminiscences and documents of about 20 people (not counting his own notes and a few anonymous witnesses). These 20 people included 4 from the imperial family (Nicholas I, the empress Alexandra Fyodorovna, and the grand princes Constantine Pavlovich and Mikhail Pavlovich). Almost all the remaining witnesses used by Korf were ministers, adjutant-generals or generals (A. N. Golitsyn, M. M. Speransky, P. M. Volkonsky, A. I. Chernyshev, A. F. Orlov, V. F. Adlerberg, L. A. Perovsky, Archbishop Filaret and others). Korf also made use of the official documents of the Investigation Committee, the Supreme Criminal Court and the State Council, materials from the court records and other sources.

When preparing his work for publication, Korf, understandably, did not reveal all the details of how it is done. The concealed history of the book is, however, essential and important insofar as we are dealing with that which stands at the opposite social pole to the main heroes of our narrative.

The *Historical Note on the Origin and Publication of the Book 'The Accession to the Throne of Emperor Nicholas I'*, which was preserved in Korf's archive, provides considerable material on this subject. It is clear from the contents that it was written in late 1857 and early 1858 on the basis of diary notes made over the preceding decade. Here we learn that Korf began to collect material pertaining to the events of 14 December as early as the 1830s, for various secret documents passed through his hands in the course of his work.

In the autumn of 1847, Nicholas I entrusted the state-secretary with the task of reading a course of lectures on jurisprudence to his second son, Grand Prince Constantine Nikolayevich. When preparing each topic, Korf drew up Notes (a preparatory plan), and 'when the topic was somewhat sensitive, in particular the history of Russian state institutions, I first, out of my own sense of caution, took them to the Sovereign to be read through and approved.'

Korf's Notes interested the heir to the throne, the future Alexander II, who, in a conversation with the historian (6 January 1848) suggested that he gather some of them together in a book about 1825. 'If this is done,' said the grand prince, 'we will have a most authentic whole, if not for our contemporaries, then at least for our descendants.'

Thus, the supreme power ordered its own history: the heir to the throne was the initiator of Korf's book. The inspired State-Secretary wrote the first version within 3 or 4 days and presented it to Alexander on 10 January 1848. The entire work was completed in 18 days.

The reminiscences of Korf himself clearly show how the history of 14 December rapidly developed from a 'family, private affair' into an essential and secret state document.

On 19 February 1848, the Tsar himself spoke with Korf about his work, regretting that he had not noted everything down at the time: 'but my wife made notes, and she has promised to show them to me.' However, two days later the news of the February revolution in Paris reached St Petersburg. 'My work,' recalled Korf, 'became ancient history, from which all interest and importance had been removed by the latest events... It became something

akin to a drying puddle in comparison to a storm-tossed ocean.'

Possibly the storm of 1848 killed any desire on the part of the authorities to remember similar events that had taken place in 1825. Whatever the case may be, Korf's subsequent allusions to the work they had requested him to write suddenly ceased to interest their imperial majesties. 'The heir listened to me and reacted to my ideas with such indifference that one might have thought he had just been asked to take a walk about the room. All interest had disappeared... As for the rosy dreams which I, specifically, had entertained in connection with this work, they, of course, were now out of the question.'

However, while waiting for a change in mood at the Winter Palace, the State-Secretary continued his work and collected the reminiscences about 1826 from several state personages. In the autumn of 1848, the historian's affairs began to improve. The sister of Nicholas I, the princess (later the queen) of Wurttemberg, Olga Nikolayevna, came to visit him. Perhaps because she had become accustomed to a somewhat greater freedom of publication, she was the first to speak in support of a small edition of Korf's writing 'for a few close relatives and friends'.

Korf had the impression that Nicholas I would not wish his work to be published 'out of modesty': the manuscript presented the role played by the Tsar in a very advantageous and flattering manner. However, a few days after the beginning of a new round of talks, on 2 December 1848, the crown prince was already informing Korf of the Imperial will that 25 copies of the book be printed.

As was the custom in such circumstances, the book was taken to the printing house of the 2nd Department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Office. Within two weeks all was ready, and on 15 December, the author handed the crown prince all 25 copies of the small book entitled *A Historical Description of 14 December and the Events Preceding It* to be taken to the Tsar. At this moment, fortune smiled on Korf: 'the Tsarevich embraced me twice'; the next day, 16 December, the historian was invited to dine with the Tsar. Nicholas I expressed his thanks, his relatives 'had much to say concerning the composition' and, on the 17 December, Korf took dinner with the Tsarevich.

Later, however, certain critical remarks were made. The Tsar, it would seem, was genuinely satisfied, and to start with, found only one mistake: on 14 December, the

barracks of the guards regiment of grenadiers had not been, as Korf had written, on the Vyborg side, but on the Petersburg side. However, Grand Prince Mikhail Pavlovich was angered by the reference to his conversation with his brother prior to the 14 December: Mikhail had then spoken of the danger presented by Constantine's renunciation of the throne of Russia and by a second oath of allegiance: 'When a staff-captain is promoted to the rank of captain, that is normal and offends no one; however, it is quite a different matter to leap ranks and to promote a lieutenant to the rank of captain. How can we explain to everyone among the people and the troops these domestic deals and why they were dealt with this way and not some other way?'

Having detected an interest, however hesitant, in his subject among the 'royal quarters,' Korf asked for critical comments from the roughly one hundred readers of his 25 copies, and concluded that 'I must work until I have identified and exhausted all the sources available to me.'

On 23 January 1849, a month after the completion of the first edition, this fast-working historian had already prepared a modified text which was sent to the 'chief editor'—Alexander, and by him to Nicholas I. This was followed by further corrections and requests. Referring to the material presented by Adjutant-General Bashutsky, Nicholas I and the chief of gendarmes, A. F. Orlov, declared that it was 'all lies and inventions'; having read General Sukhozanet's recollection of events, in which he declared that on 14 December blank shots had been fired, the Tsar remarked: 'which ended with five shots, this time real and decisive'. At this point Korf indicated to the Tsar that he would like to have the private correspondence of the members of the imperial house, and also some secret papers, for his new edition. Nicholas answered: 'It is difficult to collect our correspondence; I don't know where it is.' However, the most important letters of the 1825-1826 period were, of course, in the Winter Palace, but the Tsar possibly did not wish to show them, fearing the discovery of undesirable details. However, Korf did receive some more secret papers following the death of Grand Prince Mikhail Pavlovich (in that same year, 1849), and also from other sources.

When describing the preparatory work for the second edition, Korf said nothing about the rather embarrassing fact that he was, at that time, one of the most important figures in one of the most notorious of Nicholas' censorship institutions; the prohibition of any reference to the former insurgents was further intensified, and

Korf zealously ensured that the prohibition was respected, while himself retaining the exceptional rights of an official secret historiographer.

When another researcher, Viskovatov, who was writing a history of the Izmailovsky regiment, wanted to incorporate certain details about 14 December, (non-controversial, of course) in his work, Korf forbade it: 'It is scarcely possible to say a lot in the book, and say only a little, selectively, is awkward.'

The cold winds of censorship finally delayed even the second edition of Korf's own work. He had collected together not a little new material, but he required another surge of interest in the subject on the part of the imperial family.

It was not until the end of the winter of 1853 that the Crown Prince told the author that a new edition was essential: clearly it was felt necessary to confirm a version favourable to the Romanov dynasty in the minds of a small but influential readership.

On 18 March 1853, Korf presented his text, but yet again events intervened—the Crimean war began.

The second secret issue did not appear until February 1854 (later Ogaryov ridiculed the terminology used by Korf: 'As if one may call a publication something which is not issued for the public. That which is kept secret is not a publication... Is it that Korf lacks respect for the public, or does he not know the meaning of the word?')

The work published in 1854 contained 290 pages (as compared with 168 in the 1848 edition), and was entitled *14 December 1825*.

Towards the end of thirty years of silence, material pertaining to secret events had once again accumulated, concealed, within opposing social parties. The exiled Decembrists did not know about Korf's work; Korf did not know, and probably did not wish to know, about the secret attempts by the condemned and exiled to compile their own history of the events.

However, only a little while later the struggle around 'the bloody memory' was to come out into the open.

In February 1855, on the second day after the death of Nicholas I, Korf wrote to his sons about his history of 14 December: 'Is it not now time ... to publish this narrative for the whole of Russia?' Alexander II replied: 'It is not yet time.'

Eighteen months later, following the amnesty granted to the surviving Decembrists, Korf assumed that 'this has put an eternal gravestone' over his composition. Meanwhile,

a general awakening in the country, and the publication in London of Herzen's uncensored almanach the *Polar Star* made the subject of the Decembrists contemporary and relevant.

Nonetheless, when publishing the first Decembrist documents, obtained only with great difficulty, Herzen prefaced them with the following cautionary reservation: 'We are far from thinking that our work is full or complete. The total insufficiency of material has restricted our work extremely, and therefore we appeal to all Russians who treasure in their heart the memory of the heroes and martyrs of 14 December to obtain for us any information, any details which could be used in a historical collection or a monograph about this period. Any incidents, anecdotes, letters or notes relating to the Decembrists are of enormous value for us, for our descendants, for Russia. All such material belongs to history and must not be mislaid in hand-written copies. Give us the right to save these scattered documents from oblivion and to secure them for history with our press!'

* * *

In the summer of 1855, when Herzen was occupied with his first issue of the *Polar Star*, Pavel Lukich Pikulin left Moscow.

The war still continued, but since this celebrated doctor and university lecturer had stated that he was travelling for medical treatment to Vienna, the capital of neutral Austria, the vigilant authorities saw nothing exceptional in his trip.

Upon leaving, Pikulin embraced his friends. The famous professor of Moscow university, Timofei Nikolayevich Granovsky, who was seriously ill and was one of Pikulin's patients, and the writer Nikolai Khristoforovich Ketcher, gave him a letter and begged the doctor to be extremely careful; they knew all the three secrets involved in this journey, but if the officials and the police learnt of even one of them, then the doctor would face exile, prison, or even worse.

The first secret was his actual destination: he was going to London, the capital of a state at war with Russia.

The second secret concerned whom he was going to visit: he was going to visit their friend Alexander Herzen, whose name had been banned within the Russian Empire for the last five years.

The third secret of Pavel Lukich Pikulin was the purpose

of his journey. The doctor was delivering to Herzen letters and a notebook with forbidden verses.

Evidently, in the middle of July 1855, the news that the doctor was travelling via Vienna was passed from Moscow to Paris, to Maria Reichel, a close friend of Herzen, for Herzen replied to her: 'I await with impatience the arrival of the gentleman from Vienna... I desperately want to see him.' Although Herzen was writing to Paris, he nonetheless feared prying eyes and ears and preferred not to name the long-awaited traveller. Subsequently, he continued to call him 'the Viennese' in memory of the route the doctor travelled.

Weeks of waiting passed. The first issue of the *Polar Star* was about to come out, but Pavel Lukich had still not arrived and Herzen still had no idea what the doctor was bringing him. However, 16 August finally came. The doctor from Moscow, who knew almost no English, arrived safely on the shores of a hostile state (happily passports were not required) to be embraced by the Muscovite, Herzen, whom he had last seen many years previously. In his memoirs, *My Past and Thoughts*, Herzen wrote about Doctor V. (i.e. the Viennese), who was for him 'truly the dove of the ark bearing an olive branch in its beak. Dr. V. laughed from morning till night, showing his pearl-white teeth. True, he brought bad news about the health of Granovsky and Ogaryov, but even this was lost in the bright picture of an awakened society of which he himself was an example.'

Almost a hundred years later, among the papers of Herzen and Ogaryov kept abroad, specialists discovered that very letter brought by Pikulin from Moscow, a letter without either the name of the addressee or a signature (in case of confiscation).

Granovsky's handwriting: 'Years have passed since the time when we last had word from you. It was impossible to reply. Over all your friends here there hung a cloud which has only just dispersed... Our sailors and soldiers are gloriously dying in the Crimea, but here no one knows how to live. You will hear a lot from P.' (i.e. Pikulin).

Granovsky also wrote that he hoped to see Herzen 'perhaps in a year's time', but he also criticised some of Herzen's writings 'which reached us, too, with great difficulty and in great secrecy'. He found that Herzen's disillusionment with the Western world was excessive, as was his belief in the inner strength of Russia itself.

Then came a few lines written by Ketcher:

'Yes, your friends are acutely and bitterly aware of how much they miss you. Their position in a fruitless and hostile, or totally indifferent country is unpleasant,

oppressive and painful; but I am sure that your situation is even more onerous, even in beneficent climes. In any case, I am certain that you are attached to us just as we are to you, and nothing can replace us for you, even the most frenzied activity. If you were with us, or we with you, you would argue, curse, would stand a few bottles of champagne for any lost argument and, very probably, would not have printed much of what you have, or would have printed it, but differently. And we would not fall so frequently into apathy. The messenger, my young boy, will tell you everything much more vividly, and will even impersonate us as he does.'

Pikulin stayed for a week, recounting the news, asking questions and 'impersonating'. Herzen did not wish to argue over some of the rebukes and negative comments on his work that had reached him from Moscow. He joyfully informed Maria Reichel: 'Our Viennese guest has been staying with us since last Thursday. He is the first business-like and animated person from the hyperborean lands. I am very, very satisfied with his visit. All are alive and well, more alive than they themselves imagine.'

'From the middle of last year everything has changed,' wrote Herzen at the beginning of 1856. 'Words of warm sympathy, of genuine interest and friendly approval have begun to reach me.'

In the *Polar Star*, at the very end (after the table of contents), come lines which were obviously added 'at the last moment': 'Our issue had already been printed when we received a notebook with poems by Pushkin, Lermontov and Polezhayev. Some of these will appear in subsequent issues. We cannot sufficiently express our thanks for this notebook... At last, at last!'

Clearly it was P. L. Pikulin who delivered these poems.

On 22 August, the doctor said farewell and set off on the long journey back to Moscow. He took with him a letter from Herzen: 'Thank you, thank you... It is the first warm, bright ray of light after a long dark night filled with nightmares.'

But the bold 'little son' took more than a letter.

From the correspondence with Maria Reichel in September 1855, we learn that Herzen was worried lest the doctor was caught by the gendarmes or the customs: 'Now only one thing matters—news about the Viennese. My heart sinks, sometimes at night I start thinking and I go cold.'

But five days later Herzen was overjoyed: 'Your letter with its enclosure has been delivered to Ventnor, that is, to my burrow. My joy is inexpressible. Everything has passed off safely. That's the *alguacils* for you... Now, if

everything goes as it should, you will shortly receive the address of the trader to whom I can go about my book affairs.'

By the Spanish *alguacils*, Herzen, of course, meant the Russian police, under whose very nose the bold doctor transported a very dangerous piece of luggage and managed, albeit with some delay, to inform London of his success. Can there be any doubt that the doctor took with him a fresh copy of the first *Polar Star* straight from the printing press? It is also clear that Pikulin informed Maria Reichel of his safe return, probably enclosing a note for Herzen (the enclosure has unfortunately not survived), and was already looking for a suitable address for the delivery of literature to and from London. In a letter to Maria Reichel dated 6 October 1855, Herzen even expressed displeasure at Pikulin's lack of caution in 'writing' a second time. What for? Well, it will slip through under the noise of Sevastopol.'

Unfortunately, there is much we do not know about the biography of the courageous doctor. His archives have been lost or have not been discovered. He was not a prominent political figure or philosopher, and his friends teased him for his peculiar gift of 'defending his opinion in such a way that, on listening to him, others become convinced of exactly the opposite'. However, Pikulin made several more trips abroad, sent Herzen various materials and, so it would seem, received parcels from London addressed to the *Journal of the Horticultural Society* which at one time he published in Moscow.

A few months later, in the summer of 1856, the second issue of the *Polar Star* made its way secretly from London to Russia: it contained 23 poems either totally prohibited by the Russian censorship, or permitted only in abridged form (sent in by Muscovites, delivered by Pikulin), and they symbolised the enormous power of the free printed word. Four to five hundred years earlier, a manuscript, or sometimes simply a public reading would have indicated the completion of a work. When Homer or Dante created a poem that in itself meant its publication. The printing press, which gave life to billions of books, also gave rise to new concepts: published or unpublished works. However, whereas the manuscript was still able to elude state and other forms of control, the press, that powerful instrument for propagating the word, also enabled that word to be restricted—by censorship.

A free, uncensored printing press, by breaking through these restrictions, demonstrated the process of book printing in, so to speak, its pure form.

Much of what was printed in the *Polar Star* had been copied out between 1820 and 1855 by thousands of people, who came to know it by heart. A typical figure of the day was a student with a note-book of prohibited verse by Pushkin or Ryleyev. Just such a student, Ivan Protopov, had once given his pupil, Alexander Herzen, 'very dog-eared note-books with the poems *Ode to Freedom*, and *The Dagger* by Pushkin and Ryleyev's *Meditations* copied in small handwriting', and in 1834 titular counsellor¹ Herzen, arrested for 'defamation of His Majesty the Emperor and the members of the imperial household' wrote in his statement: 'About five years ago I heard about and received a copy of the poem *Ode to Freedom* and *The Dagger* by Pushkin and a poem by Polezhayev whose title I do not remember ... but, feeling it to be improper to have such poems in my possession, I burned them and now, as far as I know, have nothing of the kind.'

So the majority of the poems published in the second issue of the *Polar Star* were already known to the reader. However, the fact that well-known manuscripts had been published for the first time had tremendous psychological significance: in 1820 Pushkin had been exiled for writing such poetry; for 30 years the only poem by Ryleyev which was accessible to the public was to be found in the Smolensky cemetery of St Petersburg—the epitaph on the gravestone of his son, who had died in infancy (and also, considerably altered, poem *On the Death of Byron*, which Andrei Ivanovsky, writer and official in the secret police, had smuggled into an anthology in 1829 under his own initials, A. I.)

It was not until 1855 that Pavel Annenkov, a close friend of Herzen and Ogaryov, managed to publish a six-volume edition of Pushkin in which, after harsh battles with the censorship, he was able to include many as yet unpublished works. However, in many cases he still had to give way and put off publication until better times.

And now, after all of this, Herzen openly publishes the words of Pushkin:

...Russia shall from her age-old sleep arise,
And despotism impatient crushing,
Upon its ruins our names incise!

and of Lermontov:

You who surround the throne in eager droves...

¹ In Tsarist Russia a civilian rank, ninth grade (14 of them altogether)—Tr.

Such publications destroyed the work of several generations of censors; the authorities ceased to believe in the immutability of their institutions and prohibitions.

Meanwhile, after 30 years of exile, the Decembrists themselves began to return.

Dispersed for the most part to various provincial towns and estates, the Decembrists immediately joined in public life, urging on the peasant question, compiling their memoirs and corresponding with free publishers abroad. Rumours reached the authorities of the considerable sympathy felt everywhere towards the former exiles. In addition, the government was aware of increased Western interest in events in Russia. Although material on the history of the reign of Nicholas I was requested by such 'acceptable' French historians as Alphonse Balleydier and Paul Lacroix, the authorities in St Petersburg hesitated for a long time before allowing them to see unpublished documents. Meanwhile, Korf began to fear that Balleydier would simply publish his, Korf's, book in France, using one of the 50 copies of the first or second edition. Korf saw the solution in either refusing the request of the French historian, or obtaining permission himself to publish his own work.

In November 1856, Tsar Alexander II, having refused Balleydier permission to see materials relating to 14 December, also confirmed the prohibition on the publication of a large edition of Korf's book. This makes it all the more interesting to note that, only a few months later, the instinct for self-protection prompted the authorities to revise their decision. According to Korf, on 17 April 1857, Alexander II said to him: 'Now the time has come to publish your *14 December 1825*.'

"Your Majesty," I replied, amazed by this unexpected turn of events, "would it be right to revive this affair now, when you have deigned to grant an amnesty to those involved?"

"There was in this affair so much that was great and noble on the part of the late Emperor that there is now no further reason for keeping it secret. Indeed, such silence would even go against my conscience, for I have learned of the inaccurate and distorted versions about this incident that are circulating not only in Europe, but in Russia itself."

"But, Your Majesty, the circumstance that I referred to..."

"More than 30 years have passed by since these events happened, and it is only right that now, at last, history

should claim its own; in any case, the majority of those involved are long since dead, and the names of those still alive can be somehow avoided; obtain information about them at the 3rd Department of my office" (i.e., the secret police).

"And so, it is agreeable to Your Majesty that this book be issued for the general public?"

"Yes, I am convinced that this will produce a very favourable impression."

"But will it not be necessary to make certain changes or leave certain things out?"

"Why? It is all history."

On leaving the study, I came across court minister, Count Adlerberg, waiting in the antichamber to make his report. When I told him of the Emperor's instruction which I had just received he was no less surprised than I.

The news travelled round the court. Many were anxious, particularly Adjutant-General Rostovtsev, a high-ranking and influential official who had once betrayed to Nicholas I the conspiracy being prepared by his Decembrist friends.

When preparing the third edition (the first for the public), Korf studied the correspondence between Nicholas I and his brother Constantine, a correspondence 'which previously no one was able to find anywhere, and which was finally discovered on the death of Emperor Nicholas'. The historian also received other material belonging to the Romanov family. The 3rd Department sent him a list of the surviving Decembrists so that he could avoid mentioning their names in print.

About that time, minister Adlerberg, who, evidently, detected the general direction of public opinion in the country quite accurately, expressed his concern over the fact that accusations directed against the conspirators might provoke on their part 'attempts to justify themselves, which will be publicised, and this will be all the more dangerous because it will not be linked to specific people'.

It is worth noting Adlerberg's recommendation that the correspondence between Nicholas I and Constantine be published not in the language of the original, French, but in Russian translation: 'Correspondence between the Emperor and his brother in a foreign language on such important matters might produce a bad impression and provide grist for the mill of detractors, slavophiles, etc, etc.'

The opinion and request of the court minister regarding unrepentant Decembrists is exceptionally interesting:

Adlerberg requested Korf to make an alteration in the epilogue to his book. The original version read: 'The generosity of the monarch was also directed to those unfortunates who, carried away either by presumptuous delusions, or by the inexperience of youth, had paid for their guilt with 30 years of suffering.' Adlerberg suggested: 'Would it not be better to say: "By a 30-year-long but deserved banishment or exile, and by sincere repentance (although this last, as far as I have heard, is not true?)." The word "suffering" may arouse sympathy and the idea that they were indeed subjected to physical, material suffering, which is certainly not true.' Korf changed the passage in question as follows: 'By 30 years of imprisonment and by repentance.'

The minister, however, continued to feel that the publication of the book was premature, and even made yet another attempt to convince the Tsar, but the Tsar insisted. More, during the summer of 1857, when the edition of 8 thousand copies of Korf's book was being printed at the publishing house of His Majesty's Own Office, Alexander II continually inquired how work was progressing. To begin with, an edition of 12 thousand, vast for those days, was contemplated. Korf explained that, for his part, 'I was in no particular haste, bearing in mind that large number of people would be leaving Russia that summer for foreign lands.' The success of Herzen's propaganda, the constant presence of the Decembrist theme on the pages of the *Polar Star* clearly had its effect upon the attitude of the authorities.

The Tsar also wished the book to be translated into other European languages, and in the summer of 1857, Korf entrusted specialists with the task of translating *The Accession to the Throne of Emperor Nicholas I* into French, German, Polish and English. On the whole, Korf was proud of his work, and on 21 July 1857, he wrote to the Tsar to inform him that 'this work of national importance' had been completed, and that, in the name of the Emperor, 'this humble token of filial love is laid on the altar of the fatherland'. Alexander once more thanked the author 'for completing this work, so dear to my heart'.

Korf kept a precise record in his Notes of every indication of the success of his work. The edition was quickly sold as a result, so the author believed, of 'the exceptional interest presented by the material collected in it and the unprecedented nature in our country, one might say, of such official openness'. The author even noted that the press found itself in an awkward situation: it was impossible not to discuss the book, but equally impossible to write 'anything resembling criticism of a work which owed

its existence to the imperial will and whose "editorial board", so to speak, included almost all the members of the imperial household.'

Korf commented on the fact that only the journal *Sovremennik* had, in its September issue, 'included a brief article vaguely attempting something akin to an analysis, and had even ventured to say about its editor (always referred to simply as "Korf", without either title or Christian name) that 'the presentation of the material is of a high quality, and reveals in the author considerable talent as a historian.'

'The controversy that surrounded Korf's book is highly revealing. The argument over an important event that had occurred 30 years previously brought a clash of viewpoints. In explaining the success of his work, Korf affirmed that 'among the reasonably well-educated and reading public, the book had a universally most beneficial effect', and that 'the majority viewed the work as an act of noble frankness on the part of the government, thereby opening a new era in our political literature'. Herzen and Ogaryov saw the reason for the success of the book in the fact that 'books printed on the order of the government are usually sent to employees and heads of government departments and offices, to governors, and in general to people in positions of power. These gentlemen oblige their subordinates to take copies of the book, deducting the money from their salaries, or oblige those who, though not in government service, have some relation to them, to buy the book, knowing that they will all take it out of fear of coming under the surveillance of the 3rd Department.'

The government undoubtedly did encourage the circulation of the book, and it was the subject of an unusual advertising campaign. However, Herzen and Ogaryov did underestimate the effect upon the Russian reader of the very theme of Korf's work, for even official documents on the Decembrist affair were, by that time, a bibliographic rarity.

Korf attributed especial significance to the fact that, for the first time in many years, he had published a book about a 'prohibited event'. This was how he explained himself to his old school-fellow, Ivan Pushchin, when he returned from exile, promising that he, Ivan, 'will be satisfied'. Korf's opinion was further reinforced by the not inconsiderable criticism from the right-wing, a small but very influential group of people. 'Against,' Korf remarked, 'is just a small group of literary old believers, people behind the times, afraid of any novelty, and for this reason opposed to any step forward in public life.'

They have prophesied that my work will serve as a pretext for the most distorted interpretations, even—laughable as it is to say—that it will serve as the basis for a revolutionary movement... This is the extent,' exclaimed the courtier Korf, 'to which we still lag behind in publicity in any sphere!'

The 'tut-tutting' from the right also came from Court Minister Adlerberg who, in August 1857, sent a 'top secret' communication to the author (extracts from which, together with Korf's reply, are given below in translation from the French). Adlerberg reproached Korf and himself for not have noticed one dangerous passage in the book—an old (end of the 18th century) letter written by the Crown Prince Alexander Pavlovich (the future Alexander I) to his friend, Viktor Pavlovich Kochubei, and dated 10 May 1796. Korf had needed this document as shedding light on the disillusionment of Alexander I and the idea of abdication, which then left its mark on the question of the succession to the throne in 1825.

Alexander is envious of his close friend, for he is not satisfied with his own position: 'Court life is not meant for me. I suffer every time I have to appear on the court scene, and I feel ill when I see all the base actions others stoop to at every moment in order to receive some superficial distinction which, in my eyes, is not worth a farthing. I feel miserable in the company of such people, whom I would not choose to keep as lackeys, and who here occupy the highest positions, people such as Z..., P..., B..., both S..., M... (This is how the letter is printed in Korf's book. In the original the names are: Zubov, Passek, Baryatinsky, both Saltykovs, Myatlev) and a host of others who are not even worth mentioning, and who, haughty towards those beneath them, fawn upon those they fear. In short, my dear friend, I recognise that I was not born for that high position which I now occupy, and even less for that to which I am destined in the future, which I have vowed to reject in some way or other... Our affairs are in the most unbelievable disorder; there is theft on every side; every section is badly managed; order, it seems, has been expelled everywhere, yet the Empire, despite this, is seeking to expand its frontiers. In such a situation, can one man even run the state, let alone correct the abuse that has taken root within in? It is beyond the strength not only of a man endowed, as I am, with ordinary abilities, but even of a genius, and I have always held to the principle that it is better not to do something at all than to do it badly.'

Adlerberg not only sensed the value of this document

for 'hostile agitators' (and, incidentally, he sensed correctly); he even cited in his message to Korf the possible arguments of his opponents: '60 years ago a man called upon to rule as autocrat admitted that it was impossible for one man, even a genius, to discharge this duty! He reveals the worthlessness, even more, the baseness of the means that he must use, of the ministers, courtiers, the whole of the aristocracy, and finally ends by saying that he should abdicate! The situation, they will say, has not altered since then; on the contrary, it has become more entrenched; the people in government have changed, but the new, like the old, are virtually worthless, just as base as those who preceded them; insofar as the Emperor has ordered that this secret document be published while the grave of its author is still relatively fresh, this can only mean that he shares the opinion of his predecessor, thereby admitting that he is abandoning the struggle against evil and wishes to abdicate—and he should abdicate! This, more or less, is what will be said by those who want revolution and are secretly working for it, and this is what the crowd will believe when all of this is proclaimed in writings circulated in secret and immediately published abroad! These fears came to me all of a sudden... Forgive my frankness in revealing to you the feelings that have come over me. Unfortunately, there is nothing to be done! The book is already in circulation, and to withdraw it would only multiply the evil!'

In his reply to Adlerberg, Korf once more repeated his story that he had not wanted to publish a large edition, but that he was ordered to do so, and he assured the minister that not one of the commentaries on the book had made mention of the letter written by Crown Prince Alexander: 'If, against all expectations, someone were to be found who makes use of the letter for his own propaganda, it is unlikely that this new prophet will find any followers to convert to his faith. After all that Russia and the whole world have lived through since that time, after sad reality has banished poetry and romanticism, this letter has long belonged to the past. If one turns to Karamzin's history, published on the order of the Emperor Alexander I, or, even better, to Pushkin's *History of Pugachov*, printed on the order of the Emperor Nicholas, it is very easy to find there tempting impressions, ideas and examples; this is not to mention that celebrated government act—the Ecclesiastic Reglement of Peter the Great, the most absolute of all our autocrats, which proclaims to the whole world that consultative government is better than autocratic government...

'Given that the whole world has read the letter without finding in it the slightest pretext for political application—no more than I have, who have read it perhaps a thousand times—given that, if it were suddenly to be removed from the book, this could indeed have very dangerous consequences... Officials supervising the sale of the book have informed me that many of those who buy it reason as follows: 'I will go and see whether it contains everything that I have in my hand-written copy.'

Korf was of the opinion that the publication of the admissions made by the young Alexander I did not compromise his nephew, Alexander II but, on the contrary, enhanced the authority of the government: 'A government, I say, which does not fear Fenella and Wilhelm Tell in its theatres, nor yet historical publicity, thereby proves its strength. I am convinced that the secret scribblers to whom you, Count, are alluding, should they start, as does sometimes happen, to defame the book, its author and, perhaps, its heroes, will be the first to applaud the moral strength of the government which published this letter. As for those who are secretly working for revolution—God grant that they do not find other, more effective ways of inflaming minds than these childish scribblings!'

This correspondence is of interest because it helps to identify the unstable and changing borderline between 'permissible' and 'impermissible', between what may be made public and what may not, between the fear of the authorities in the face of greater freedom, and their views on what this greater freedom might entail.

Despite all of Korf's assurances, criticism from the right soon concentrated mainly on the letter written by Alexander to Kochubei. The historian, who valued his status at court, was sensitive to these blows and recorded them in his Notes: 'While praising the work itself, they openly censured the idea of publishing it, and particularly of offering for public judgement the letter written by Emperor Alexander, and everything connected with it in general. Your book, said some, is nothing but a clear criticism of Alexander Pavlovich, who let Russia become the victim of internal strife solely out of cowardice, or because he feared that his younger brother, like the elder, would refuse the throne, or because he wished to protect during his own lifetime the touchy self-esteem of that elder brother. How could this letter, said others, be brought out into the light of day when Alexander had himself ordered that it be burned, thereby forgetting that the crown prince had given this order solely so as to

conceal his feelings and intentions from his contemporaries and avoid danger to himself, and this should the bearer not succeed in handing the letter to Kochubei personally.'

Nonetheless, the orders given by Alexander II regarding Korf's book remained in force, and on 6 September 1857, the publication of a fourth edition (the second for the public) was announced.

Shortly thereafter, however, there was criticism from the left, as predicted by Count Adlerberg. In Russia this criticism could not get itself into print, but it existed, and was to be found primarily in Decembrist circles. On 21 August 1857, Pushchin wrote to his friend, the Decembrist Batenkov, about Korf's book: 'I read it with revulsion, although he had assured me that I would be satisfied... The soul-destroying, servile flattery strikes you from the first page of the introduction.' The day before, Matvei Muravyov-Apostol wrote to his nephew: 'Yesterday evening we finished reading the famous book by Modest Korf. I cannot understand what could have made it necessary to publish this unsuitable praise of Nicholas I, a man whose pitiful activity ended so unhappily for Russia. From Peter to females like Anne and Elizabeth, the reign of the "unforgettable" was the least remarkable for Russia. I await with interest to see what the *Polar Star* will say in its analysis of this panageneric. There is certainly no shortage of material.'

The editors of the *Polar Star* were not slow to express their opinion.

Korf's book was sent to England fairly quickly: the author wished to arrange for the English translation to be published by the well-known publisher Murray, but the latter demanded to see the text first, 'since in recent years England has already been flooded with numerous books about Russia'. The subsequent course of events is reconstructed on the basis of announcements and articles in the Free Russian Press, and those same Notes made by Korf concerning his work. Korf's chronicle is all the more interesting in that he wrote it while the impact of events was still fresh in his mind.

The official historian and his translator (Shaw) were surprised by the long silence which followed the publisher's receipt of the English text. 'We both ascribed this stubborn silence on the part of Murray to the influence of the Indian mutiny. The uprising of sepoys in India, which began in 1857, had eclipsed all other interests in England, when suddenly, one morning in September, Shaw came to see me, solemnly bearing in his hand the 1,560th issue (19 September) of the London *Athenaeum*, which contained an announce-

ment about the book... But that was not all! On another page of that same issue of the *Atheneum* came the following: "Mr Trubner and Co., 60, Paternoster Row, London, hasten to announce that they have prepared for publication an English translation of *The Accession to the Throne of Emperor of Nicholas I*, written by State-Secretary, Baron Korf, with an introduction and critical comments by Alexander Herzen."

'It appeared that our English translation has a rival—and what a rival! With an introduction and critical comments by the notorious Herzen-Iskander, who, in his vengeful hatred towards Nicholas I, towards his memory and even his name, will not fail to pour out on this book his bile and poison, and whose work, there can be no doubt, will be more to the taste of, and will more adequately satisfy the curiosity and sentiment of the heroes of Alma and Redan, than will our innocent translation! Shortly afterwards Shaw, who had already moved to town, received a telegramme from Murray which, thanks to the skill of our copyists, was totally unintelligible, and finally it was not until 6 October, new style, that we received a detailed letter in which Murray informed us that his book was ready, that the first edition would consist only of 1,000 copies, and that, having himself met all the expenses of publication, he was offering the Library one half of the profits. The disappointing return is a result of Herzen's involvement, whose sting I fully expected and still expect in his Russian publications, but I never thought to come up against him in the English publishing world.'

'Herzen did not make us wait long,' commented Korf. And indeed, 20 September 1857, the day following the announcement in the influential London *Atheneum*, is the date of the first 'Antikorfist' (the term used by Herzen) document 'A Letter to the Emperor Alexander II (about the book by Baron Korf)'.

This famous declaration by Herzen was published in the fourth issue of the uncensored newspaper *Kolokol* (Bell) on 1 October 1857. This same issue of a free Russian newspaper delivered two further blows to the book *The Accession to the Throne of Emperor Nicholas I* and its author (both are honestly recorded by Korf in his Notes).

First of all, Herzen commented on the two-volume Paris edition of Alphonse Balleydier's *A History of the Emperor Nicholas (30 years on the throne)*. Korf was of the opinion that Balleydier borrowed a great deal from him and 'distorted a great deal'. Herzen wrote in *Kolokol*: 'As Shakespeare said, when sorrows come, they come not single spies. Following upon the book by State-Secretary and cavalier Korf, there appeared a history of the Emperor

Nicholas in two volumes written by Balleydier. This last book is completely beyond our comprehension. Korf, a State Secretary, a cavalier, a privy counsellor, librarian and I know not what else, might be allowed the right to servility before Nicholas. Well and good. But this Balleydier (Alphonse), of his own free will, by chemical affinity, has written a book even more servile in tone!..

'While it may be true that "diligence overcomes all", excessive diligence spoils all. We cannot be suspected of feeling any sympathy for the Emperor Nicholas, yet even we felt a twinge of pity when Korf and Balleydier make of Nicholas and all his associates a universal laughing stock, sparing neither sex nor age.'

Finally, the same issue of *Kolokol* carried the announcement: 'The editorial board of the *Polar Star* plans to issue in the very near future a critical analysis of the work *The Report of the Investigation Committee and the Supreme Criminal Court, 1826* by Mr Korf, with the text of the report and the sentence reprinted in full.'

Korf noted a change in the original intentions of his opponent and wrote: 'Herzen later changed his mind, and in place of an English translation decided first to publish the Russian original with his own critical comments, promising in all the foreign newspapers that he would publish this work—in an edition of around 400 copies—by the middle of December 1857.'

The wide circulation of Korf's book and its translation made any reprinting of the text superfluous. The nature of the attack gradually became clearer: a critical analysis with lengthy extracts from the text, and also articles and other material devoted to the true history of the Decembrist movement: material which could serve to counter Korf.

After the publication of the fourth issue of *Kolokol*, Herzen and Ogaryov threw themselves energetically into their work on the promised detailed analysis. As early as 1 October 1857, Herzen wrote: 'Our brochure with the text of the Report of the Investigation Committee will cause a furore in Russia—that's fine.' On 12 November of the same year, the well-known French historian Jules Michelet received the following information from Herzen: 'In Russia a book about Nicholas has been published by a certain Baron Korf. To counter this repulsive, Byzantine servility and bureaucratic baseness we are printing a special work entitled *26 December 1825 and the Emperor Nicholas*. The publisher wishes to issue a French translation at the same time.' (26 Dec., new style (Gregorian calendar) accepted in Western Europe, corresponded to 14 Dec., old style (Julian calendar) then in use in Russia.—Ed.)

On 1 January 1858, the writer Ivan Turgenev was informed that 'the book by Korf is ready'; the new-year issue of *Kolokol*, 1 January 1858, announced the publication of the book *14 December 1825 and the Emperor Nicholas*. Shortly afterwards, in Hamburg, there appeared a German translation, and finally, also at the beginning of 1858, Herzen published an article in French entitled 'The Russian Conspiracy of 1825', in the introduction to which he explained the link between this work and 'Antikorfics': 'The editorial board of the *Polar Star* recently published, through the agency of Messrs Trubner and Co. a book in Russian entitled *26/14 December 1825 and the Emperor Nicholas*. It provides a fairly detailed refutation of the official version of the circumstances surrounding the accession of Nicholas—a version written by a certain State Secretary, and edited by *Nicholas himself*—the foul work of a eunuch, worthy of a Byzantine rhetorician or a Bonapartist prefect.

'In accordance with the wishes of the *International Revolutionary Committee*¹, which with such brotherly kindness commemorated our martyrs on the anniversary date of 26 December, we have written this small essay, this condensed account of the basic facts cited in our book.'

Thus the Free Russian Press attacked Korf's book at least three times: in the *Kolokol*, in a separate book, and in an article about 'The Russian Conspiracy'. Furthermore, Herzen selected Korf himself as the target for constant fire. 'It is clear,' he wrote, 'how this servile brochure came to be written during the reign of Nicholas, although one cannot but be amazed that he was able to read such heavy, clerkish, vulgar flattery. It somehow carries the crudely-cut stamp of his time—poverty of thought, conventional forms, a narrow horizon, official coldness, the ruthlessness of a mediocrity, repulsive official sentimentality; not that air in which a man may breathe freely, but an oppressive atmosphere of the second order in which move and act, like fishes in water, the Kleinmikhels, the Chernyshevs, the Kokoshkins and the Benkendorfs²—some better, some worse, but all the most mediocre of mortals.' According to Herzen, Korf's fault lies 'not in some expression, not in some detail, but in the pitiful, deceitful, slavish view of events'.

Korf tried to prove that the insurrection was 'a masquerade of licence plotting a crime', i.e., an event that

¹ The International Committee—an organisation which, in the 1850s, linked revolutionaries in various countries.

² Ministers of Nicholas I.

was of no particular historical significance, and important only in that it constituted a threat to the imperial family. From London there came grounded objections regarding this most important event in Russian history: 'If this was a mob of dissolute and mischievous boys exploiting the clumsily improvised interregnum in order to make a noise on the square and then disperse a few hours later, then how is one to explain Nicholas' fear of 14 December, this *idée fixe* of his reign, which he did not forget, even on his deathbed?'

And indeed, in his reminiscences Nicholas I spoke of 14 December as if of events 'which are important, as they provide the true explanation of the causes or reasons of happenings upon which depends the destiny, and even the life of men... I would even say, the life of kingdoms!' (This quotation is copied out by Korf in his Notes about his book.)

The most telling aspect of 'Antikorfics' was that it proved the seriousness, the natural inevitability of the events of 14 December. Herzen and Ogaryov, 'children of the 14th December' who knew the names and the stories of those involved, even though ignorant of many of the details, clearly perceived the significance of these events within the context of Russian history. What remained to be done was to prove this in print.

There were almost no sources of information: the memoirs of the Decembrists had not yet reached London. In writing his *Analysis of the Book by Korf*, Ogaryov faced a difficult task, that of getting at the truth concealed within official documents written precisely with the aim of concealing the truth. He drew mainly on the material from Korf's own book. There he noticed the letter written by Crown Prince Alexander Pavlovich to Kochubei—and many of the fears expressed by Count Adlerberg proved to be justified.

'It is fortunate for the memory of Alexander I; wrote Ogaryov in his *Analysis*, 'that this letter to Kochubei was reprinted in full in Korf's book. How could the worthy State Secretary fail to understand from this letter that Alexander's desire to renounce the throne was not an expression of passing irritation or foolish romanticism?... It was not passing irritation, not yet romanticism which led him to contemplate withdrawal, but genuine revulsion felt by a decent man at the vulgar and dishonest milieu in which he was fated to enter as soon as he succeeded to the throne... However, it is not surprising that such people and such a state of affairs do not appear so repugnant to the baron as they did to Alexander I. This same

state of affairs was bequeathed by the previous reign to Alexander II. Baron Korf grew up and became state secretary in this state of affairs. Having, on the one hand, been swept up by mysticism, he came, on the other, under the influence of precisely such people, and Arakcheyev appeared at the head of government. But the desire for a better state of affairs, the desire for genuine civil order, was to be found not only in the tragic person of Alexander I, but also in society.'

For Ogaryov, naturally, what is important is the parallel between Alexander I and Alexander II. Although, 'now we are not in the days of 14 December, when the need for a better civil order was felt only in the upper circles of society; now the mass of the people thirst for liberation from the rule of landowners and official robbers... Who will be responsible for the unnecessary shedding of blood and the agonising convulsions of Russia? The answer, of course, is that very same state of affairs, those same people whom Alexander I did not wish to have as lackeys. We unhesitatingly point to them as enemies of the fatherland.'

By correlating the facts in the documents obtained 'from across the border', Ogaryov was working, at the end of 1857, on the first true history of the Decembrists (nothing was yet known in London of Lunin's attempt in the 1840s). 'Is it surprising,' wrote Herzen, 'that we made mistakes, given that we had absolutely no documents, but only the recollections of two or three conversations whispered behind locked doors? Let the sons, the brothers, the friends of our great predecessors come to our aid.'

The blows delivered by Herzen and Ogaryov, full of information totally new to Russian society, morally convincing and brilliantly written, produced a powerful impression on people in various political groupings. On 19 January 1858, Matvei Muravyov-Apostol expressed his admiration for Herzen's letter about Korf: 'It is amazing how clearly the writer has understood the heart of the matter, as if he had lived through the period and known the prominent figures involved.' On 24 December 1860, the same Decembrist wrote: 'Yesterday I read Ogaryov's analysis of the Report of the Investigation Committee... How restrained and dignified the style. It provides not the slightest temptation to abuse or condemnation. Although there can be no doubt that both can be read between the lines.' Gorbachevsky made more than one hundred sympathetic comments in the margins of the book by Herzen and Ogaryov. 'When you read the letter by Herzen,' wrote Pushchin to his wife, 'you will be very

pleased.' At the beginning of 1858, the well-known publicist K. D. Kavelin informed Herzen: 'Your latest letter to the Emperor concerning the book by Korf is circulating in hand-written copies and having an indescribable effect. Indeed, our literature has never offered anything of its kind.'

In the autumn of 1857, Korf was given permission to print the fifth edition of his book (the third for the public). This was the most public-orientated edition to date (not two roubles a copy, but one silver rouble). In his Notes on the third edition, presented to the Tsar, Korf praised his work: 'This historic work has been greeted by the public with gratitude and lively sympathy.' Alexander II, who agreed in principle to the publication of a third edition, nonetheless, noted in the margin: 'Unfortunately, not by everyone.' Korf commented on this remark: 'Envy, ill will among those at court, and obscurantism have, therefore, played their part.' On 18 October 1857, at an evening reception at Tsarskoye Selo, Alexander II displayed coolness towards Korf and expressed his dissatisfaction with a poor German translation... At this point Korf's Notes on his book come to an abrupt end.

It is difficult for us to understand what lay behind all the nuances of official opinion; Alexander II might well have been very sensitive to criticism from the right, from people such as Adlerberg and other high-ranking officials, and in this respect the blows delivered by Herzen would, in their own way, serve to rehabilitate Korf in the eyes of the court. However, the historian himself considered his work to be a progressive beginning, and clearly drew no comfort from this collision. 'On reading your book,' Herzen and Ogaryov were told by an informed friend, 'Korf fainted—literally fainted.'

We know that, on 8 November 1857, Korf sent a note to the chief of gendarmes complaining about Herzen's articles, and then prepared a document in which he presented his case and which was clearly intended for publication abroad. In it he referred to himself in the third person—'Self-Glorification against Herzen'. The *Kolokol* is in the hands of the Emperor,' wrote Korf, 'and my friends will naturally not miss the opportunity to be of service to me. Something must be done to contradict them.'

Somehow or other Herzen learned about this, and in the fourteenth issue of the *Kolokol* (1 May 1858), asked: 'Is it true that Modest Korf wishes to reply to our book 14 December 1825? We hope so, and wait with anticipation.' Korf, as we know, did not, in the end, engage in

polemics. The Tsar consoled the state-secretary by writing on his report: 'I advise you to ignore Herzen's abuse, he is worth nothing more. Decent people will be eternally grateful to you for having preserved for posterity one of the most remarkable pages of history. As for my own gratitude, you know about it already.'

However, there were no further editions of Korf's work.

Thus ended a fairly noisy episode in the social history of the 1850s. What was interesting about this episode was the very appearance of new documents 'for the public', and the granting of permission to speak about the Decembrists. Korf took pride in his services, but the rapid awakening of society after 1855 proceeded at such a pace that what had been impossible the day before was already reactionary the day after. The few thousand copies of Korf's book were easily eclipsed by free publications which were also printed in thousands of magazines, collections and newspapers; each copy of the free press had a considerably wider readership than any of the official publications. By 1857, advanced thought had moved onto the level of the *Kolokol*, the *Polar Star* and the journal *Sovremennik*; they were steadily winning back the long-hidden past from its guardians, and one could still find taking part in these battles the elderly, yet eternally youthful heroes of 1825. We have selected the tale of the unusual life and the friends of one of these heroes to conclude our narrative.

7

Big Jeannot



'In St Petersburg ... on 15 December, we prayed privately in Kazan Cathedral and then went to the house on the Moika... That same day Lyceum friends appeared. At the head of them all, Matiushkin and Danzas... Every meeting is a pleasure, and there were those one had not expected to meet. I was completely oblivious of the Petersburg cold that everyone is complaining about. So much has been happening that I have had no opportunity to pick up my pen.'

This letter written by the Decembrist Ivan Pushchin is full of concealed meaning.

15 December 1856—31 years after the 14 December. There is no indication of who the 'we' are who went to Kazan Cathedral: apparently Pushchin and his brother, and possibly one or two others from among the Decembrists who had returned. A prayer said by a few old men in the vast cathedral not far away from Senate Square, private prayer—on the thirty-first anniversary of events which had changed their lives, though they had not changed Russia.

When in St Petersburg, Ivan Pushchin stayed with relatives who lived on the Moika. There can be no doubt that he knew that a flat in the neighbouring house on the same street had been the last residence of the greatest of Russian poets—Pushkin.

At this point we will return for a while to the beginning of our narrative in order to sketch the portrait of the Decembrist Pushchin among other, extremely interesting faces.

On 4 May 1789, in Moscow, a fifth child—a son, Ivan—was born to Lieutenant-General Ivan Petrovich Pushchin.

Exactly two months later, on 4 July 1798, in Gapsala (Estonia), a second child—a son, Alexander—was born to Major-General Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorchakov and was shortly thereafter taken to Moscow.

A little less than 11 months later, on 26 May 1799, in Moscow, a second child—a son, Alexander—was born to Major Sergei Lvovich Pushkin.

As the boys grew, without ever meeting, to the age when they could attend the Lyceum, Tsar Paul gave way to Tsar Alexander I, Napoleon conquered half the world and Russian troops defeated the Swedes, the Turks and the Persians.

Then the boys left the protective warmth of their homes, put on blue jackets, white trousers, three-cornered hats, met each other—and their hour had come.

These three are now the heroes of our tale. As we follow them we shall learn some interesting facts, and also find ourselves faced with certain mysteries.

The earliest lines known to have been written by Pushkin are in the album of the 13-year-old Alexander Gorchakov.

'You write only for your pleasure, while I, who love you sincerely, write to tell you this. A. Pushkin.'

Gorchakov's class-mate chose to express his feelings by a translation taken from a piece of old French literature.

Gorchakov was popular with many of his fellow-pupils and they were proud of him: always first, clever, good-looking, a Riurikovich prince, but one of them, no airs and graces. Who has not met such first-year pupils—attractive pranksters, leaders, those who sit in a quiet corner and describe their incredible adventures and fantastic victories—their school-fellows laugh, pretend they do not believe, but are envious!

But let us let the third pupil to speak for himself:

'I hear: Alexander Pushkin! A lively young boy, curly-haired and sharp-eyed, steps out, also a little embarrassed. Whether because of the similarity in surnames, or because of something else that unconsciously drew me to him, but I noticed him from the first glance.'

Later this similarity in their surnames, Pushchin—Pushkin, became menacing. After 14 December, investigators noticed it time and again and found it interesting: 'And might not Pushkin be Pushchin?' After all, Ivan Pushchin and his brother, Mikhail, were both imprisoned in the fortress.

As yet only half the road to the fortress has been travelled. Incidentally, the unlucky number on the door of the room had already provoked laughter: 'Above the door was a small black plate with the inscription "No. 13 Ivan Pushchin"; I looked to the left and saw "No. 14 Alexander Pushkin".'

They loved to play with numbers—all their lives they signed their letters to each other with their school numbers. The school management loved to stand the boys in line according to their academic performance: No. 1 (out of a possible 30) Gorchakov, or Volkhovsky. Pushchin was No. 18, Pushkin—No. 19 and sometimes lower. However, this 'table of rank' was sometimes decisively and democratically rejected by the lyceum brotherhood:

*Who is first, who is last
What nonsense such lists are.
We all come bottom of the class.
Hey-ho. Fa-la-di-la.*

If we look at the lyceum with a strictly scientific, pedagogical eye, then it appears to be—heaven knows what! To start with, it is not even clear what a lyceum actually is. The best definition of this institution was given by Count Miloradovich, governor-general of St Petersburg: 'The Lyceum is not exactly a university, not exactly a cadet college, not a gymnasium, not a seminary; it is—the Lyceum!'

One or two efficient teachers, a few educated but indifferent pedants, old Foma and his drinking, the servant Sazonov who, it was later discovered, was a murderer, Colonel Frolov, the inspector and temporary director of the Lyceum, a vulgar army man.

Much later, that most meticulous product of the lyceum, Modest Korf ('Modinka' and various other nicknames), admitted that he could not understand how such an institution had managed to produce so many worthy people, and how so much that was serious could have emerged from such a collection of pranks and vices.

Here is Pushchin's portrait, the portrait of 'Big Jeannot' or 'Ivan the Great', taken exclusively from Pushkin's Lyceum verse: Jeannot is a 'flighty sage', his wisdom consisting in his simplicity and health ('With dire Hippocrates you're wholly unacquainted'), in the fact that:

*Dear friend of mine, you're happy!
In golden calm and ease
Your carefree life is passing...¹*

Unlike many, Pushchin does not 'sully pages', does not compose verse. His most important 'sign' would seem to be his drinking cup: 'my brother of the cup', 'old drinking companion', yet he is nonetheless one of the most honest and honourable of men, whose directness sometimes, apparently, infuriates the young Pushkin, who is not always willing to acknowledge justified criticism:

*...We've had many a quarrel,
But when we fill the friendly cup
All rancour is forgotten!²*

This transition from dispute to reconciliation was obviously particularly agreeable, and when they part Pushkin once more recalls 'quarrels when friends fall out, and sweet conciliation'.

In the same way we can put together a picture of

¹ Tr. by Peter Tempest.

² Tr. by Peter Tempest.

Gorchakov ('prince', 'dandy', though no settled nickname ever seemed to emerge): 'a charming flatterer, whose tongue can sting', 'a non-God fearing wag', 'philosopher and imp'. Three poems by Pushkin are addressed to Gorchakov, and although they are very different and separated by the equivalent of whole epochs (the period between 15 and 18 years of age, and between 18 and 20 are more significant than entire decades in maturity and old age), yet the same motif can be heard in all three: Gorchakov is clever, of an illustrious family, will be very successful, but let these successes be glorified by some 'poet, court philosopher' who 'bowing, brings an ode of two hundred lines to the illustrious grandee'.

The future 'crosses, diamond stars, laurels and wreaths' are of no importance:

*God grant you love, so all your lifetime you,
Sweet foster-child of Epicurus,
Have Bacchus by your side, and Cupid!'*

The 'sign of Gorchakov' is Cupid's dart.

It is as if Pushkin were afraid that Gorchakov will betray love, and thereby cease to be Gorchakov.

*How many tears shall see in you the culprit!
Friend of betrayal and a flighty lover,
Be true to all...*

Gorchakov had already decided upon his future long before he finished the Lyceum. He wrote to his uncle:

'If a situation were to arise similar to that which heralded 1812 ... then doubtless I would, though not without regret, exchange the pen for the sword. However, as this, I hope, will not happen, I have chosen for myself a civilian career and, on your advice, the noblest of such careers—diplomacy.'

And a month later:

'Our director, Mr Engelgardt, who served in the diplomatic corps for many years, has offered to help prepare us for a diplomatic post... At the moment there are four of us, and he will teach us how to write dispatches, how to keep records, how to make envelopes without using scissors, how to make various types of packages, etc., etc.—in a word, it will be exactly as if we were actually in diplomatic service; it is nice to know even such minor details as how to make envelopes, etc., before entering one's career.'

In the meantime, Pushchin was preparing himself for

¹ Tr. by Peter Tempest.

the future somewhat differently:

'Even while I was still wearing the Lyceum uniform, I often visited a society whose membership then consisted of the Muravyovs, Burtsov, Pavel Koloshin and Semyonov. Koloshin was a relative of mine. Our frequent conversations about public affairs, about the evil of the existing order, and about the impossibility of achieving the changes that many secretly desired created an exceptionally close bond between myself and this circle of thinkers; I became close friends with them, virtually lived with them. Burtsov, to whom I expressed my thoughts with greater frankness, was of the opinion that, with the views and convictions I had brought with me from the Lyceum, I was ready to join the cause... This noble aim of life penetrated into the depths of my soul by virtue of its very secrecy and the new obligations it traced before me—it was as if I had suddenly acquired particular importance in my own eyes.'

Pushkin was not initiated into the secrets of the first Decembrist gatherings: 'The changeability of his fiery temperament and his friendship with unreliable people caused concern.'

Pushkin suspected, but was not completely certain: Big Jeannot did, of course, speak of 'evil' and 'the possibility of change', but nonetheless was preparing for military service and, in all probability, talked about the future solely in terms of his hopes of being an effective and useful officer for the army and his soldiers.

With a little imagination it is easy to visualise the three school-friends arguing amongst themselves before going out into world—arguing over the meaning of happiness and the purpose of life. In this imagined scene, Gorchakov and Pushchin talk about noble and honest service, with Pushchin alluding to some special service to the fatherland. Both reproach the poet with frivolity, and Gorchakov may well have said something like: 'It is all very well for Pushkin, he is relying on his talent, whereas we can rely only on ourselves.'

Pushkin readily agrees with these reproaches.

Then, however, he begins to tease, to provoke and, as often happened, to threaten his friends that he would hold them responsible if a harsh preceptor were to appear. Then Pushkin leaves, and Pushchin undoubtedly hints to the prince-dandy about the existence of a secret society. However, such a society does not suit Gorchakov—he argues that one should pursue a career, that is, advance, not out of self-interest, but in order to develop one's abilities for the common good. It could even be that Gorchakov, laughing, asked his friend Jeannot whether, if his party

should win, leniency will be shown to former Lyceum pupils—all appointed to respectable positions, or, at the very least, exiled to some milder corner of the country... Then they would have talked about Pushkin, about whether or not he would become a little more serious, and it is highly likely that Pushkin would have recalled how Gorchakov had solemnly confiscated the mischievous poem *The Monk* and destroyed it as unworthy of Pushkin's talent.

Oh, with what ease, what thoughtlessness they threw into the fire or the waste-paper basket pages that, today, scholars spend thousands of days seeking to recover!

A comment by the famous poet Zhukovsky on the verse addressed to him by the young Lyceum pupil, Pushkin, has survived to this day: 'Splendid ... best work.' This comment has survived, but the verse by Pushkin has disappeared.

There was a speech in verse which Pushkin addressed to his friends in the literary society Arzamas. The members of the society remembered only the first line: 'The crown of hopes! Thus I see you...'—the rest is unknown.

A complete drama entitled *Phatam, or Human Reason* was written, of which four verses have miraculously survived. Or there are audacious epigrammes, half of which, it seems, are unknown to us; Pushkin regularly composed dangerous Christmas carols, of which only one has survived (and that only hand-copied) about Alexander I: 'Hurrah! The roving despot is riding into Russia!' However, these are not pages that were lost or disappeared due to unthinking carelessness... Now secrecy begins: escaping the police, the dungeon, Siberia. The Statutes of the first secret Decembrist organisation—the Union of Salvation; the Green Book—the secret programme of another Decembrist society called the Union of Welfare; about these we know only by hearsay, from the evasive, approximate accounts of those who read them and then hid or burned them.

Indeed, it is surprising how many such pages, notebooks and books survived to another age. Ivan Pushchin, for example, collected and preserved dozens of Lyceum songs—'paeans', poems and couplets by Pushkin and other dear friends who succumbed to 'the sin of versifying', Delvig, Kuhelbeker. Once, however, he added to this pile of papers a few of a different kind, extremely secret—the constitution drafted by Nikita Muravyov for a future, liberator of Russia.

It is unlikely that Big Jeannot agreed with the death sentence passed by Prince Gorchakov on Pushkin's 'unworthy *Monk* '...

Yet more than a hundred years later, on 18 November 1928, a sensational piece of news will appear, first in the evening edition of a Leningrad newspaper, and then in dozens of papers and journals: in a house that had once belonged to Prince Gorchakov a large pile of papers is discovered and handed over to the State Archives—and among the papers are three note-books in Pushkin's handwriting.

The *Monk*! It is said that when the discovery was shown to specialists, the well-known expert on Pushkin, Pavel Shchegolev, began to copy down *The Monk* rapidly on his cuffs: what if the 'apparition', the indestructible manuscript, were suddenly to disappear?...

Prince Gorchakov had outwitted four generations!

However, let us return to 1817, to the last Lyceum conversations, farewells...

How much do we actually know about those conversations?

*We'll talk about the Caucasus in ferment,
Schiller and glory, not to mention love...*

Those young boys were, of course, just like any others of their age about to part on leaving school—it matters little when or where: in Melanesia, or ancient Egypt. As a matter of fact, it was not all that long ago. Many historians at the State Museum of History will remember the old scholar and numismatist, Alexander Alexandrovich Sivers (1866-1954); he was a direct link with Gorchakov whom the young Sivers knew very well. So, just two human lives take us back to the days of Pushkin—and the second of these was that of a class-mate of the poet, and even older than the poet himself.

Not long ago! Yet all this happened before the telegraph was invented, before the telephone, the radio, photography, the steam engine, the steamship—more than 50 thousand days ago...

'Exemplary behaviour, diligence and the excellent results in every branch of the sciences which you have achieved during your six years at the Imperial Lyceum have made you worthy to receive the second gold medal, which is awarded to you on the authority of His Imperial Majesty. May this first sign of distinction which you are receiving as you prepare to go out into the society of citizens be a sign to you that merit is always acknowledged and receives its award, and may it always encourage you to fulfil with zeal your obligations to the Sovereign and your fatherland.'

These lines are written on the certificate of merit

which Gorchakov took with him from the Lyceum. Much later he would write:

'In my youth I was so ambitious that I carried poison in my pocket in case I should not be given due promotion.'

It is important to the ambitious Gorchakov to finish the Lyceum in first place, but he is even happier (as we know) to win second place: first place is taken by Vladimir Volkhovsky, and this result improves the career prospects of his class-mate, whose family is not wealthy and has no connections. For ambitious people like the prince, second place is often the best. Indeed, sometimes it is best to be last (as long as one is on the way to becoming the first!)

Then came the parting vow: 'And the last of us will celebrate 19 October alone.' And all signed their names.

Suddenly the arguments with Pushchin, the somewhat haughty lecturing by Gorchakov, the tediousness of Modinka, and even the coarseness of Colonel Frolov were behind them and therefore already nostalgic memories.

Who has not heard these school-boy vows at graduation evenings—to be followed by the coldness of accidental meetings on the street between old class-mates who pass each other as strangers, or call out casually: 'How are things, old boy?' But on graduation day everything is different. In Pushchin's album we can read in Pushkin's handwriting verses about 'eternal bonds between the earliest friends in life', which withstand 'the stormy times and menaces of fate'. However, this confrontation with times and fate does not come immediately or in simple forms.

To commemorate their departure, Director Engelgardt, presents them all with rings of cast iron—a symbol of enduring friendship—and they become the brotherhood of the ring

Pushchin—an officer in the Mounted Artillery of the Guards;

Gorchakov—an official at the Board of Foreign Affairs with the rank of titular counsellor;

Pushkin—also enters the Board of Foreign Affairs, but as his Lyceum results are lower than those of Gorchakov, he is one grade below him—board secretary.

* * *

Much later, Pushchin will be arrested and, during his interrogation he will be asked:

'Did you ever belong to a secret society? Who accepted you into it?'

'I belong to a secret society... I was accepted into it by Captain Belyayev, who served in the Kiev regiment

of grenadiers.'

Nicholas I and the Investigation Committee search the entire country to find Belyayev, but there is no such person...

Further interrogation:

'The Committee once more asks you to make a true statement about when precisely, by whom and where you were accepted as a member of the Secret Society, and also about the whereabouts of the Belyayev you referred to, his Christian name and rank.'

Answer:

'On the demand of the Committee I have the honour to reply that I was indeed accepted into the Society in 1817 by Colonel Burtsov here, in St Petersburg. I frankly admit that I did not wish to declare this, believing him to have broken away completely from the Society. To my great shame I declare that the Belyayev to whom I referred at the beginning is a purely fictitious person. This deviation from the truth, made out of a certain feeling of sympathy for Burtsov, now seems to me to be too base for me to continue this painful correspondence on the subject. This statement has been signed by board assessor Pushchin.'

The above was written after Burtsov himself, having been brought face to face with Pushchin, had stated that it was he (Burtsov) who had once accepted the former Lyceum pupil into the Secret Society.

However, all these unpleasant events will happen later, in about 8 or 9 years' time. As yet, Pushchin is only beginning his adult life... In his memoirs he recalls how, after they had left the Lyceum, he was several times on the verge of telling Pushkin about his secret, but at that very moment there came some prank, some piece of tomfoolery, and he refrained.

In any case, it seemed that more opportunities would present themselves—so why hurry? Pushkin was moving along his own path towards the Decembrist movement—he had already written several revolutionary poems and a number of dangerous epigrammes.

The conspirators, it would seem, trusted his verse more than they trusted Pushkin himself.

Pushchin: 'The circles in which we moved were completely different. After that we somehow saw each other only infrequently.'

And what about the prince, the dandy?

*Fashion's disciple, high society's friend,
The brilliant observer of our usage,*

*You bid me all acquaintance I should end
With peaceful circles where, worshipping beauty,
Unprecedented leisure hours I spend.*

Such is the beginning of the third *Epistle to Prince Gorchakov*, written two years after they had left the Lyceum. Evidently they still met and talked, and Gorchakov lectured Pushkin ('You bid me...').

Pushkin, however, does not listen. On the contrary, he calls Gorchakov back to their past, to their school-day pranks and amusements:

*And I confess I find a hundred times more pleasing
That happy family of those young rakes.*

The rake—such was the former Gorchakov (5 years earlier he had been called 'your highness rake').

*Why don't you leave your nobles for a while,
The circle of my friends to multiply...*

Five years earlier, Gorchakov was 'my friend' ('What should I, tell me, now wish my friend with all my heart?'), but now it is not clear—he is outside the circle of 'my friends', and it is merely suggested that he multiply it.

'1819, December 12th, Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov is granted the rank of gentleman of the bed-chamber,' the lowest rank at court.

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin would be given that rank in '1833, December 29th', and he would find it inappropriate, ludicrous for a 34-year-old poet. However, for the 21-year-old Gorchakov, such a rank is elevated enough for the minister of foreign affairs, Chancellor Nesselrode, to respond initially by protesting: 'The young man is already aspiring to my position.' (Nesselrode will be chancellor for another 37 years, but it is none other than Gorchakov who will replace him!) In 1819, however, it seems that the young prince had exerted considerable pressure on the minister via influential patrons, indeed, what else could he do ('... in my pocket I carried poison, in case I should not be given due promotion')?

*We enter a new world, dear friend of mine,
But there we are assigned a lot unequal
And various traces shall we leave in life...*

Eight years later the poet will repeat:

Entering life, we soon went different ways...

And here is a secret note written by an informer:

'In society, they call it the "Lyceum spirit" when a young man does not respect his elders and is familiar with his superiors... A derisive moroseness darkens the minds of these young men, and it is dispersed only in hours of noisy revelry... At the Lyceum only a few attended the course of lectures on political science, and it was precisely these who did not subsequently become liberals, such as, for example, Korf and others.'

This denunciation, sent in after the Decembrist uprising, was aimed against the 'liberals', that is, the free-thinkers, against both Pushkin, and the members of secret societies, and the 'derisively morose' Gorchakov (although he had attended the 'course of lectures on political science').

Dignity, restraint, irony... Perhaps they had not grown so far apart on going out into the world?

One day in April, a certain lover of poetry arrived at Pushkin's flat while Pushkin himself was absent, and offered Pushkin's manservant, Nikita Kozlov, a huge sum of money, 50 roubles, to let him read manuscript copies of his master's verse. Nikita refused outright and reported the incident to Pushkin. Pushkin realised the true identity of the poetry lover and burned some of his manuscripts—and the next day received an invitation to present himself at the house of the governor-general, Count Miloradovich, on Nevsky Prospect. Recollections by contemporaries as to what happened next have come down to us:

'Miloradovich orders the chief of the city police to go to the flat (of Pushkin) and to seal all the papers. Pushkin hears this order and says to him: "Count! All my verse has been burnt!—you will find nothing in my flat; but if you wish, you will find everything here (and he pointed to his forehead). Send for paper, and I will write down everything that I have ever written (except, of course, what has already been printed), with a note to say it is mine, and that the manuscript is in my name.'"

Miloradovich, moved by this easy frankness, exclaimed majestically "c'est chevaleresque!"—and shook his hand. Paper was brought in. Pushkin sat down and wrote, and wrote ... and wrote a whole note-book. Miloradovich was walking up and down the room reading the verses as Pushkin wrote them, and occasionally stopping to laugh, and he even regretted that there was nothing in the epigrammes against the State Council or the Senate (Pushkin wrote down all but one epigramme, one so dangerous that it was impossible to show it even to the most

sympathetic of governor-generals). The poet was allowed to return home and ordered to await further orders. The next day the note-book was shown to the Tsar.

'And what have you done with the author?' asked Alexander I.

'I informed him,' Miloradovich answered, 'in the name of Your Majesty, that he was forgiven!'

'Was not that a little premature?'

On 14 February 1937, 117 years later, a special session of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR will adopt a resolution: to search for the 'Miloradovich note-book', a hand-written anthology whose author, as he wrote it, did not know how it would end—with a smile from the governor, the dungeon, Siberia... The well-known researcher and expert on Pushkin, Tatyana Grigoryevna Tsyavlovskaya, had the following to say about the efforts made by the most experienced specialists to carry through 'the task set by the Academy':

'A note-book (a whole note-book!) of anti-government verse by Pushkin... P. Ye. Shchegolev once searched for this note-book in the archives of the Winter Palace in Leningrad. M. A. Tsyavlovsky searched for it in the files of the 2nd Department in the Ancient Acts Archive (in Moscow). I, too, have looked for the note-book—I have looked among some of Miloradovich's papers dated 1820 found in the file of his adjutant. Up to date these searches have yielded no results. But we must not give up. The search must continue.'

We should point out here and now that the Academy's resolution of 14 February 1937 has not been fulfilled to this day. The note-book has not been found, and anyone who reads these lines can still try his good fortune...

However, let us return to the St Petersburg spring of 1820 and to our main hero, who clearly wanted but a few more weeks to his twenty-first birthday.

Alexander I was displeased with the excessive kindness of Miloradovich, but considered it would be improper to revoke the word of a general: besides, Pushkin has friends who solicited on his behalf—Chaadayev, Karamzin, director of the Lyceum Engelgardt. Finally a middle course was selected between imprisonment and complete pardon—exile to Kishinev. A paper was quickly drawn up allowing board secretary Pushkin 1,000 roubles in paper currency for the journey. There was not even time to say farewell to friends. In any case, they were not so easy to find: Pushchin, for example, had left some time before on a business trip to that same Bessarabia whither Pushkin was now to travel, while Gorchakov was attending some conference abroad. And is it worth pestering others with

one's person? 'My dear friend,' Pushkin wrote to Chaadayev after he had set off, 'I called to see you, but you were asleep; it was not worth waking you over such a trifle.'

On 6 May 1820, Pushkin departed. His old school-friends went with him as far as Tsarskoye Selo.

It was at this time that Pushkin was returning from the south to St Petersburg:

'The Byelorussian road is hideously boring. Not meeting anyone at the posting stations, I usually glanced into the passenger register to see who had passed through. On one occasion I saw that the day before Pushkin had passed through on his way to Yekaterinoslav. I ask the postmaster: "Which Pushkin was that?" It never even occurred to me that it might be Alexander. The postmaster replied that it was the poet, Alexander Sergeyevich who, it seems, was travelling by post chaise and wearing a red belted blouse folk style and a felt hat (the weather was extremely hot). I could understand nothing whatsoever—while I was living in Bessarabia I had no news of our old Lyceum circle. I was perplexed.'

In that unusual and precarious situation, a meeting at some staging post along the Byelorussian road would have been important and memorable for both, but, alas, the geography of Russia caused the road to divide, and two weeks travel lay between their routes. They were not to meet for another 5 years.

'Had Pushkin arrived a day later at the crossroad turning to Yekaterinoslav, our paths would have crossed, and how happy I would have been to embrace him at such a moment! Clearly we were fated to meet just once.'

Shortly afterwards Engelgardt, the Lyceum director, informed Gorchakov:

'Pushkin is in Bessarabia, and doing there what he has always done: writing wonderful verse, doing silly things, and committing unforgivable acts of folly. I am sending you one of his most recent plays from which I derived inexpressible pleasure: in it there is something that suggests a self-appraisal. May God grant that it is not in words only, but also in the depths of his heart. When I think what this man might have become, the image of a wonderful building that collapses before it is completed is what always presents itself to my mind.'

In the late 1930s, Sergei Eisenstein, one of the most outstanding Soviet film directors, was thinking of making a colour film about Pushkin. The second half of the film (St Petersburg, the last years of the poet's life, the duel) he envisaged mainly in black and white, but the first half, about Kishinev and Odessa, was to be in colour.

Living in a different world, a world where even the colours were different, it was not easy for Pushkin to find a common language with the other brothers of the ring in their black-and-white capital. There was no correspondence between him and Gorchakov, and almost none with Pushchin during his years in the south.

They were in the classic situation, so dangerous but so necessary to youthful friendship: separation, distance, in order to meet again—or not meet again. However, Pushkin did communicate with many of his friends in print; in place of letters he came to them with the poems *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, *Caucasian Captive*, the first stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*, or with manuscript copies of seditious compositions (*The Dagger*, *Epistle to the Censor* and new epigrammes). Contact between them did not cease, but the Kishinev and Odessa of Pushkin are too far removed from the St Petersburg of Pushchin and the London of Gorchakov.

One fine day Pushkin was dismissed from service and sent from the warm exile of Odessa to cooler climes: to the ancestral estate of Mikhailovskoye near Pskov...

He had probably never had such a bad time as he did in the first months at Mikhailovskoye: the humiliation of exile, impotent anger, the possible treachery of those close to him, the tyranny of his father, and even thoughts of suicide.

On 19 October 1824, the day of the Lyceum anniversary, as his second month at Mikhailovskoye was drawing to an end, he did not seem to have given a thought to his old school comrades from whom he was separated by 280 versts: in spirit he was still in the south.

Nor was he the only one to forget—many of them had not seen each other for a long time, did not write, could not be bothered to write... Fortunately there are always one or two class-mates who are loyal, faithful continuers of tradition, who keep the ties of friendship. One of them was, for example, Misha Yakovlev, who at the Lyceum had been known as 'the jester'. On that same day, 19 October 1824, a few of the 'brother beasts' gathered at his flat in St Petersburg and decided that on the tenth anniversary of their graduation (that is, on 19 October 1827), they would mark the silver anniversary of their friendship, and in twenty years—the golden anniversary. The golden anniversary would be on 19 October 1837.

Around the same time, at the end of 1824, the young judge Ivan Pushchin, while at a party at the house of the Moscow Governor-General Golytsin, informed his friends that he intended to visit the Mikhailovskoye exile. His

well-wishers advised strongly against it: 'What! You want to visit him? Don't you know that he is under double surveillance—by the police and the church?'

A few pages from the reminiscences of Pushchin tell us about this unusual meeting on 11 January 1825.

Around eight o'clock in the morning, Big Jeannot arrived at Mikhailovskoye, having managed to pick up three bottles of champagne in the town of Ostrov. The friends parted after midnight. 'In the meantime there were many jokes, anecdotes, laughter from a full heart. All these precious details would have survived had a stenographer been present.'

Remembering this episode over 30 years later, Pushchin could naturally not be completely accurate, and, for various reasons, left much unsaid, creating not a little work for curious posterity. 'Once again we imperceptibly touched upon suspicions about the Society. When I told him that I was not alone in entering this new service to the fatherland, he jumped up from his chair and cried out: "It must be all in connection with Major Rayevsky. They've been holding him in the Tiraspol dungeon for over four years, but have got nothing from him." Then, calming down, he continued: "However, I am not, dear Pushchin, trying to force you to speak. Perhaps you are right not to trust me. Probably, I do not deserve such trust—due to many of my stupidities." I hugged him without saying anything; we embraced and went out for a walk; we both needed to relax.'

In the next paragraph, Pushchin begins a new theme: 'We went to the nanny's room, where the seamstresses had already gathered,' which means that if we adhere to the letter of the text, the Decembrist admitted only that he had found 'a new service to the fatherland', but, in response to Pushkin's 'I do not deserve such trust' did not continue the topic ('hugged him without saying anything'). However, the investigators had long suspected that a good deal more was said in discussions on 'dangerous topics'. At dinner—and Pushchin does not hide it—toasts were drunk to Russia, to the Lyceum, to absent friends and to *her*—that is, evidently, to freedom (of the feminine gender in Russian).

On parting, 'we embraced heartily in the hope of possibly seeing each other shortly in Moscow. This feeble hope made parting easier.' They must have spoken about Pushkin's possible release from exile, and it is hard to imagine that Jeannot did not say something to the effect that 'the activities of the Secret Society, radical changes, will bring you freedom'. Pushkin, who was at the time particularly bitter against Alexander I, naturally would

not have hidden his feelings.

However, it would also seem that this January conversation between Pushkin and Pushchin about approaching freedom did not end without friendly argument:

*...We've had many a quarrel,
But when we fill the friendly cup
All rancour is forgotten!*

We have before us the following lines: 'It is a well-known fact that Pushkin, the author of *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, had always been opposed to secret societies and conspiracies. Has he not said about the former that they are rat-traps, and about the latter that they resemble those quick-ripening fruits that are grown in hot-houses and destroy the tree by absorbing its juices?'

This would appear to have been the answer Pushchin gave during his first interrogation by Nicholas I (17 December 1825). The quotation is taken from the book *The History of the Life and Reign of Nicholas I*, written by the very well informed French historian, Paul Lacroix. There can be almost no doubt that Pushchin indeed made some such answer to the Tsar, but it is no easy to determine whether the Decembrist had heard these words from the poet, or was simply shielding his friend. The laconic, cleverly-formulated phrase sounds very much like Pushkin, but when might it have been said? Prior to exile in the south? But then Pushchin had still not revealed to Pushkin his position with regard to secret societies. It is far more likely that these ideas were expressed during their last meeting.

If only we knew everything they spoke about and argued about that day, 11 January 1825, from eight o'clock in the morning to three at night!

Pushkin was, at the time, engaged in writing his memoirs, which later, according to his own admission, he burned. However, there are some researchers who do not believe that they were burned, and who point to evidence that the poet preserved a great deal and hid it from 'prying eyes'. What we must do is search...

Semyon Stepanovich Geichenko, for many years the director of the Pushkin memorial estate, says, sometimes with a smile, but more often very seriously, that he 'would not be overly surprised' if a box were suddenly discovered in the garden of the Mikhailovskoye estate, or near to the nanny's little house, or somewhere on the slope of Trigorsky hill, and in that box...

No one can doubt that the most extraordinary adventures await those who search for Pushkin's lost papers; if one

note-book containing verse by Pushkin was caught up in the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, if a bundle of extremely interesting letters by Pushkin literally fell out of a hiding place in a wall when one of the palaces on Fontanka was being repaired, if new fragments of his burnt autobiography can be deduced from pages which have survived, then why should there not be a small chest, a hoard, a cipher on the bank of the Sorot River near Pskov, or on the Black Sea coast, on the Neva, on the Moskva River, in Boldino, in a factory in the Urals, a mine in Siberia, or even in Japan, England or South Africa (it should be noted, moreover, that these last geographical designations have not been selected at random...)

Pushchin left Mikhailovskoye. It would seem that he always had with him a briefcase with secret papers: Lyceum leaflets, a number of Pushkin's early verse and, next to them—the secret documents of the secret societies.

To the final examination, the 'stormy times and stormy fate' there remained 11 months and 3 days.

Meanwhile, knowing nothing of all of this, Court Counselor Gorchakov travelled home from London to take a cure. Having bumped many a verst along the dreadful roads leading to Pskov, he arrived at his uncle's house in the village of Lyamonovo, not far from Mikhailovskoye. Here he learned quite a lot about Pushkin, because his uncle was the provincial marshall of nobility, and his duties included, amongst other things, surveillance of the exile in disgrace. Gorchakov sent word to Mikhailovskoye of his arrival, and one day in September 1825, Pushkin set off to visit him: they had not met for 6 years.

If Pushchin was frightened of some of the people with whom the poet associated ('don't meet them'), then Gorchakov probably feared them all the more. However, the prince knew which paths should not be taken: better to be second than too obviously first.

The letter which Pushkin wrote to his close friend, Pyotr Vyazemsky, has survived. Evidently, Gorchakov was present as it was written.

'Gorchakov will deliver my letter to you. We met and parted fairly coolly—at least on my side. He dried up dreadfully—but that was only to be expected: we do not have maturity here in the north, either we dry up or we rot, and the first is nonetheless preferable. Having nothing better to do, I read him a few scenes from my comedy' (and that was *Boris Godunov*).

Pushkin was hiding something, his self-esteem had been wounded by something ('having nothing better to do').

In his old age, Gorchakov will recall: 'Indeed, Pushkin

liked to read me his works, as Moliere used to read his plays to his cook. In *Boris Godunov* there were a few lines which seemed to reveal a sort of refined vulgarity and contained something about saliva...' Gorchakov said: 'Cross out that bit about the spit, old man, surely that's unnecessary here.' 'But why? In Shakespeare you can find expression far worse than that,' objected Pushkin. 'Yes, but Shakespeare was not living in the 19th century, and he used the language of his age.' Pushkin thought for a moment and rewrote his scene.

This prince, it would seem, was pleased that he made his criticisms from a very modern point of view (what was acceptable in the 16th century will not do in the 19th century!). Pushkin, on the other hand, may well have thought to himself: 'He noticed the bit about spit, but failed to see much that is more important.'

Vyazemsky is told the truth, only the truth, but not the whole truth about Gorchakov. All would appear simple and clear: a poet and an intelligent but stiff careerist. However, the past emerges to disrupt this neat little picture: 19 October. Gorchakov, it is true, had never once attended the Lyceum anniversary gatherings, but clearly this is not the point that matters.

*You, Gorchakov, blest from your early days,
All praise deserve, for fortune's chilly glitter
Has not transformed your freedom-loving spirit:
True to your friends and honour you remain.
Fate bid us separate: studies completing,
We parted swiftly, far and wide we ranged,
But on a country road came a chance meeting
And brotherly embrace we exchanged.¹*

This was written a month after that not all-too-happy reunion—yet it is also the truth.

On 19 October 1825, Pushkin dedicated a few verses to 6 ex-Lyceum pupils: Korsakov (the first to die), Matiushkin, Pushchin, Gorchakov, Delvig, Kuhelbeker and one other—

*...which one of us shall in old age be fated
To celebrate the Lycee Day alone?*

Time passed. On 19 November, exactly one month after the Lyceum anniversary in 1825, the Emperor Alexander I died in Taganrog, and Pushchin said to his companions: 'This is a good opportunity; if we do not do anything, we will fully deserve to be called scoundrels.'

Then important events followed in the life of each of the

¹ Tr. by Peter Tempest.

three.

Fifty years later, Gorchakov told a historian who came to see him:

'It is worth noting that, just before 14 December 1825, I was in Moscow. Here (the governor) Prince Dmitri Vladimirovich Golitsyn had much to say, amongst other things, about my old school-fellow from the Lyceum at Tsarskoye Selo, Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin, then serving in Moscow, in the criminal court. He was full of praise for his battle against bribes.

'Knowing that I was going to St Petersburg, Prince Golitsyn also suggested that I travel with Pushchin who, as it later turned out, was hurrying there on business connected with the Secret Society, but of this, that is, of the real purpose of Pushchin's trip, Prince Golitsyn, of course, knew nothing.

'It so happened, completely by chance, that I left Moscow not with Pushchin but with Count Alexei Bobrinsky. If I had travelled in the same carriage as Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin, then I would, in any event, have been among those involved: at the very least, I would almost certainly have been called in for questioning about my acquaintance at that time with Pushchin, one of the chief conspirators. But that, as you see, did not happen.'

Pushchin and Gorchakov did meet in Moscow in that late autumn of 1825, but their conversations are barely audible to us. There is nothing about them in Pushchin's notes. Gorchakov kept no special notes; indeed, as the years passed he wrote less and dictated more.

They would certainly have spoken about their Lyceum friends and about Pushkin (whom, apart from themselves, only Delvig had visited, and Delvig was now in St Petersburg).

However, Golitsyn 'knew nothing' about the real purpose of Pushchin's journey. And Gorchakov?

'During my visits to St Petersburg there was, however, an occasion on which one of the members of the Secret Society spoke to me about the need for such a society.

'I, who, by the way, did not yet suspect anything, gave him to understand that I was firmly convinced that noble aims are never attained by secret conspiracies, and the half-spoken suggestion died on the lips of my interlocutor.'

It was only several decades later that it became clear that 'one of the members of the Secret Society' was the self-same Pushchin. Prince Gorchakov knew something of what was happening, but had not been initiated into full knowledge.

Hastening on his way to the capital, Big Jeannot wrote

to Mikhailovskoye and, although the letter itself has not survived, we have reliable evidence that it existed: the letter reported that Pushchin was on his way to the capital and would very much like to see Pushkin there.

Pushkin immediately prepared to leave, but he never did: his own account of his unfortunate meeting with a priest, a hare, etc.,¹ indicate that he hesitated. In such a situation, any trifle will serve to tip the scales and determine the outcome. Only recently, yet another note about the same event, written by one of Pushkin's friends, was discovered: 'Pushkin said: "It is not fated to be."' Later he said that 'fate had protected him', that is, he would not have remained idle if there had been work to be done.

'Work to be done'—Senate Square...

14 December. Pushkin was at Mikhailovskoye not knowing, of course, what exactly was happening in St Petersburg, but able to guess much of it. He was finishing a light-hearted long poem, *Count Nulin*, begun the day before. Later he would ponder over the date: 'There are strange coincidences...' The mischievous, light-hearted poem is so far removed from events in St Petersburg on that day that one cannot help thinking whether, perhaps, it might not be related to them in some other way, one that is not immediately obvious, as is often the case when situations are far removed from each other: *Count Nulin* and Senate Square; insurrection, gunshots—and melodious, lively lines... Different routes to freedom?

As for Pushchin, he was one of the first to come out onto Senate Square, joking and cheering up the soldiers. When it was necessary to halt the formation of mutinous soldiers who wanted to charge after the enemy, the Decembrist officers, their commands inaudible because of the noise, did not know what to do... But the retired artillery officer and judge had the presence of mind to sound the retreat on the drums and restore order. On returning from the square, he found traces of canister shot on his sheepskin coat. Kuhlya—Wilhelm Kuhelbeker—had been standing beside him, firing and shouting. The Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum was represented by two of its graduates on Senate Square. Suddenly a third appeared...

Gorchakov: 'On 14 December 1825, I was in St Petersburg and, knowing and suspecting nothing, drove past with a postillion on my way to the Winter Palace in order to take my oath of allegiance to the new Tsar, Nicholas Pavlovich. I set out from the house of Count Bobrinsky, where I was then staying, and drove along Galernaya street and across

¹ Ominous signs for a journey in old Russian superstition.

the square without paying any attention to the motley and disorderly crowd of people and soldiers. The reason I paid no attention was that, in the course of several years, I had become accustomed to seeing such dense and heterogeneous crowds on the squares and streets of London. As I now recall, I arrived at the Winter Palace wearing stockings and heavily powdered...

Nicholas I probably thought the newcomer was mad: the insurgent guards regiment of grenadiers which could easily have occupied the palace had only just passed by on its way to the square. A regicide might appear at any moment; at the sound of the first cannon shot, the young Empress twitched her head, and such nervous attacks were to continue for the rest of her life. And here, all of a sudden, was this heavily powdered young man wearing spectacles (the wearing of spectacles at court was strictly forbidden).

This first meeting between the new Emperor and Court Counsellor Gorchakov did not bode well for the latter.

Canister shot. The insurgents dispersed. That evening a few men, including Pushchin, gathered briefly at Ryleyev's flat and then went home to await their fate. Only Kuhelbeker fled to be apprehended only in Warsaw.

Ryleyev was at home, and Pushchin was at home...

We do not know where Pushchin spent that dreadful evening. Let us look at one of the letters he wrote later, when in penal servitude, and sent by hand, by-passing the official post service, to the Lyceum director Engelgardt:

Irkutsk, 14 December 1827:

'It is now two years, my dearest and most respected friend, Yegor Antonovich, since I last saw you... I often remember your words when you said that it is not difficult to live when things are good, and one must be content when they are bad.'

It would therefore seem that on the evening of 14 December 1825 Pushchin called to see his former director. When? At dawn he was on the square, in the evening—at Ryleyev's...

The gendarmes came for Ryleyev during the night and took him away for questioning. Ryleyev told the Tsar the names of the most prominent members of the Society, the names of those who 'are responsible for everything', insisting that there was no need to search for and arrest any others. Pushchin was among those he named, but the St Petersburg authorities did not remember the Moscow judge, and time was needed to find him.

Gorchakov, who had meantime returned from taking his oath, already clearly understood what had happened. Revolt, insurrection were alien to him, but his friends, his school-

fellows from the Lyceum, especially Big Jeannot, were in mortal danger! What will the man, not long before ready to take poison 'in case I should not be given due promotion', do now?

'Early on the morning of 15 December, Pushchin was visited by his Lyceum friend, Prince Gorchakov. Gorchakov brought Pushchin a passport for travel abroad and begged Pushchin to leave immediately, promising to take him to a foreign ship which was ready to sail. Pushchin refused to leave; he thought it shameful to avoid by flight the fate that awaited the other members of the society; having acted together with them, he wished to share their fate.'

The above was written many years later by Yevgeni Yakushkin, the son of a Decembrist and one of those closest to the aged Pushchin. It was Yevgeni Yakushkin who literally compelled Pushchin to write his memoirs. His information is usually precise and detailed. Moreover, this episode is confirmed by several other reliable witnesses.

So it seems that the meeting between Pushchin and Gorchakov actually took place, and in that case Gorchakov is, of course, a man to be admired. If the police had arrived, the diplomat would have found himself in serious trouble: arrest, possibly resignation and exile from the capital. However, as we can see, a component part of Gorchakov's ambition was self-respect; if there is nothing to respect oneself for, then there is no purpose in pursuing a career—and if this is so, then he must meet Pushchin and offer him a passport.

One should not look for absolute accuracy in the testimony of Yevgeni Yakushkin (first published in 1881). For example, as it was winter, no ships were sailing at that time from St Petersburg, and perhaps Gorchakov suggested fleeing St Petersburg and taking a ship from another port. It is also possible that the meeting took place not on the morning of December 15th, but on the 14th. That was the day when it seems Pushchin saw the Lyceum director. It is quite probable that Gorchakov went to see Engelgardt, whom he deeply respected, after he had been to the palace to take his oath of allegiance, and that some of the other Lyceum graduates also went to see him.

If this is so, then the evening of the 14th saw a remarkable meeting of Lyceum old boys—the epilogue to 19 October.

It was perhaps at this meeting that Engelgardt said that life is not difficult when things are fine, and that one must be content when things are bad. At this same meeting Gorchakov may have offered Pushchin a passport, and Pushchin refused and went home.

In that letter to Engelgardt written exactly two years later, Pushchin was clearly alluding to that last meeting:

'I regret with all my heart that, after being sentenced, I did not have the opportunity to embrace you and all my loyal friends, whom I ask you to embrace for me: there is no need for me to name them—you know who they are; I hope that a distance of 7 thousand versts will not separate our hearts.'

Loyal friends would seem here not to be simply the accepted formula.

Pushchin, naturally, gave a great deal of thought to his briefcase with its secret papers on the evening of the 14th and, possibly, on the morning of the 15th. We can assume that he thought of burning them, but it seemed a pity...

One and a half centuries later, the author of this book found himself in the Manuscript Department of the Lenin Library, where he was given a note-book consisting of 34 large pages. It began:

'1. The Russian people, free and independent, is not and cannot be the property of any individual or family.

'2. The source of Supreme Power is the people.'

Written in the hand of Ryleyev, it was composed by one who has appeared more than once in our narrative: Nikita Mikhailovich Muravyov.

How many years do fingerprints survive? Let us suppose that they can survive one hundred and fifty years: then we have the hand of the author, Muravyov, and that of Ryleyev, and then the fingerprints of Big Jeannot, followed by those of whom Pushchin said: 'there is no need for me to name them'... Gorchakov, Engelgardt, a few others... After then comes 16 years of silence and secrecy. In 1841—the fingerprints of Pushchin's younger brother Mikhail, also a Decembrist, who returned from exile earlier than Ivan. Very likely the ageing Lyceum director handed over to him the briefcase that belonged to his old pupil. However, the life of the semi-pardoned Mikhail Pushchin was still uncertain, and the briefcase was given to Pyotr Vyazemsky; an old friend of that early group of Lyceum pupils, in the 1840s he was a successful man, a prominent official... Each of those who handled the treasured briefcase found, lying next to the severe political prose of the Decembrists the light, care-free rhymes of Pushkin:

*Here lies a student gravely ill.
Fate of its prey will not be cheated.
No good is medicine or pill
For love's a sickness can't be treated!*¹

¹ *Inscription on a Hospital Wall*, tr. by Peter Tempest.

Completely harmless lines—but how dangerous is the proximity of the Lyceum compositions and Decembrist projects... Equally dangerous are the ideas this gives rise to there, up above...

'Is Pushkin Really Pushchin?'

On 14 December 1825, the first of those to be arrested were brought at night to the palace; on 4 September 1826, Pushkin was handed a 'summons' to return to Moscow from exile. 'Knowing that he had committed a few liberal escapades, Pushkin was convinced that he would be taken straight to Siberia. He hastily put on his long frockcoat, all prepared.' Soon, however, he learned that he could 'travel freely in his own carriage and not as a detainee, but accompanied only by a state courier'.

These two dates are separated by 264 days. It is one of the most dramatic periods in the life of Pushkin. Only a short while previously, on 19 July 1826, board counsellor Alexander Boshnyak and state courier Vasilii Blinkov had left St Petersburg for Novorzhev with an open letter (that is, a warrant) 'for the arrest of Pushkin and his dispatch to the appropriate place, should he prove to be guilty'.

Alexander Karlovich Boshnyak is not an unimportant figure in the history of those years, but no direct reference is made to him in a single official document; there is only one indirect allusion—'the agent of Count Witte'. These people were named publicly only 16 years later, on 7 June 1842, at a university lecture in Paris. In his final lecture of the 'second cycle' of his talks on Slavonic literature, Adam Mickiewicz had the following to say:

'At that time, Count Witte was the chief of police in the southern provinces, and had already received information about a conspiracy from one of his agents, whose name I will give as it is not mentioned in a single official document or history of the period—it was a certain Boshnyak, a traitor and spy, more skillful than all the famous heroes of this kind to be found in novels by Cooper.

'This Boshnyak, a writer ... accompanied Count Witte everywhere, giving himself out to be a naturalist. He was fluent in nearly every language, was able to penetrate various secret societies, and he passed on to Witte secret information about the conspiracy.'

Contemporaries testify that Boshnyak, a man of erudition who, in his youth, had studied together with Zhukovsky and dined with Vyazemsky and Karamzin, was seen by other cultured people as a representative of their circle, and this virtually removed any suspicion that he might have links

with the authorities or be an informer.

The great Polish poet was himself under surveillance by Witte via Boshnyak and only escaped by a miracle. Possibly Mickiewicz was later able to tell Pushkin about the danger he had been in when he was in the south—Boshnyak's field of operation. However, it was not until the 1870s that it first became known that Boshnyak had also been invisibly observing Pushkin in the summer of 1826.

However, in the 19th and early 20th centuries no details about the Boshnyak mission were known. Boshnyak's report on his 'trip to Pushkin' was published later, and begins with the following introduction:

'To the Commander of the reserve cavalry corps, Lieutenant-General Count Witte.

'To the Board of Foreign Affairs from board counsellor Boshnyak.

'Report.

'Pursuant to the oral instructions received from Your Grace, I left Pskov province for the town of Novorzhev to carry out the investigation entrusted to me on the 19th day of July of this year, and completed it on the evening of the 24th day of the same month, wherefore, on the 25th day at 8 o'clock in the morning, I sent state courier Blinkov, who was waiting for me at the Bezhanitsy staging post, back to St Petersburg. As for what I have discovered concerning a certain subject, and also concerning other fairly important circumstances, this is set out in the two notes included and marked A and B. I also have the honour to append open warrant No. 1273 issued in the name of state courier Blinkov, under my signature by the duty office of His Imperial Majesty, which has remained unused, together with an account of the sum spent on travelling expenses out of the 300 roubles issued by the same office for this purpose, the remaining 51 roubles 70 kopecks being herewith enclosed.

'Moscow. August 1st, 1826.'

What was the connection between Witte, the head of the southern military settlements, and Pushkin in that summer of 1826? Why is that, on his 'oral instructions' someone goes to check Pushkin, taking with him, moreover, 'open warrant No. 1273'?

It turned out that there are still unstudied archive and literary materials which will allow us to penetrate further into this secret game played out around the figure of the great poet and which, as has already been said, constitute an important element in the invisible part of his biography.

Let us go back a little.

Various biographical details about Ivan (Jan) Osipovich

Witte (1781-1840) (not based upon his personal archives which have, unfortunately, disappeared without trace), enable us to build up a portrait of the man himself: small, sallow-skinned, exceptionally wily, with little education, but able to create (particularly among the top generals of Nicholas I) the impression of being extremely well-educated and well-read; a man of dubious integrity, extraordinarily lazy, but capable of being a very efficient administrator for brief yet crucial moments ('he has mercury flowing in his veins'—was the comment of one contemporary who hated him). Witte was a man of intrigue, capable of donning any mask, a notorious Don Juan, an ingratiating careerist and a past master of investigation and provocation. Grand Prince Constantine Pavlovich, who, incidentally, felt an intense dislike for Witte from his youth, wrote in December 1825: 'General Witte is the greatest scoundrel the world has yet managed to produce: religion, the law, integrity do not exist for him. In a word, he is a man who, to quote the French, is worthy of the gallows.'

Witte owed his rapid rise (he was a colonel at 20), largely to his family links with prominent Polish and Russian aristocrats, acquired through his famous stepfather, Count Stanislaw Szczensny Potocky; nor, as he rose through the ranks, did he win renown as a soldier: when, during manoeuvres, the troops under his command began to retreat, General Yermolov explained to the astounded Emperor: 'It would seem that Witte takes this for a real battle.' Nonetheless, as a general he quickly won the recognition of Alexander I, and later that of Nicholas I, for 'special services'; it would seem that Witte took his first lessons while still a child: in the 1780s his mother, the famous beauty Sophia Witte, 'won the favour of Potyomkin himself, who gave her secret political assignments'. Witte dated the beginning of his 'secret career' to 1809. In 1811 he appears to have headed the police investigation in the Polish provinces. Subsequently, as virtual head of the military settlements in southern Russia, he was able to retain the special favour of Alexander I despite his enormous overexpenditure (which the Decembrists knew about), and to arouse the jealous hatred of Arakcheyev.

The files of General Headquarters contain certain documents which allude to the general's secret activity; the General Headquarters Chief Dibich wrote of him: 'He is exceptionally useful in special circumstances, and is capable of performing special duties.' On 11 January 1823, 'on the orders of His Imperial Majesty', Dibich instructed the governor of Kiev 'to give due attention to the oral assignment which Lieutenant-General Count Witte has for you.'

'The Emperor has entrusted me with three important matters,' boasted Witte in May 1823. One of these was the overall management of the Richelieu Lyceum in Odessa, suspected of being a possible source of free-thinking in the south; although he almost completely destroyed this educational establishment (run by his adjutants and the housemaid of Karolina Sobanska, his mistress), Witte nonetheless, thanks to this post of his, succeeded in keeping a secret watch on the Polish professors; this suddenly led to discoveries involving the Decembrists.

Witte had links with the agent provocateur Sherwood, but he had two main agents. One was Karolina Sobanska, maiden name Rzewuska, for many years the common-law wife, and then the legal wife of the general; then, in April 1825, there appeared the figure of Boshnyak, a retired college assessor, a naturalist, and a nobleman from Kostroma, who found himself in the south after inheriting an estate near Yelisavetgrad (the administrative centre of the southern military settlements), where the headquarters of Witte was situated.

The information concerning the beginning of Boshnyak's career as a spy is contradictory. His descendants asserted that he was a 'weak-willed victim of the wily Witte'; according to the boastful accounts of Witte himself, he recruited Boshnyak, who in fact was inclined to free-thinking, under threat of arrest and punishment.

In order to gain a more complete picture of those who, in the summer of 1826, directed their attention to Pushkin, let us note the existence of a version which declares that General Witte himself straddled the fence. Witte stated that 'at the outset, he intended to join in the conspiracy, supposing that it concerned the overthrow of the omnipotent Arakcheyev, the repulsive grand vizier of Russia'. However, he then realised the true nature of the conspiracy, and 'any hesitation would have seemed criminal'. There is an amazing coincidence between this and Mickiewicz's statement that 'the Count hastened to warn the government. On the one hand, he knew Arakcheyev, then invested by the Emperor with the fullness of power, very well. On the other, he wished to discover the plans of the conspirators and the means at their disposal. However, the information passed on by Sherwood obliged Witte to send a report to St Petersburg.'

The Decembrist Sergei Volkonsky gave his own curious version of how Boshnyak came to be a secret agent: 'With his education, intelligence and thirst for action, the life of a landowner was too restricted. He wanted to find something which would offer him more scope, and made a mis-

take.'

It is possible that Boshnyak did hesitate to start with, but by the summer of 1825 he has thrown himself heart and soul into the service of the powerful general. Clearly, the explanation given by Boshnyak's relatives that he succumbed as a result of an 'unstable character' is completely inadequate. However, the recollections of Boshnyak's nephew concerning the secret journey to observe Pushkin are of interest: 'My uncle ... admitted to my father that the poetry that had made Pushkin famous was not at all to his taste, but that he was obliged to praise it since all around him were lavishing praise on this new poet.'

In his notes, one of Witte's contemporaries speaks of the secret operations conducted by Witte and Sobanska. (This activity became more noticeable after the suppression of the Polish uprising in 1831.) At the beginning of the 1820s, in the south of the country, neither Pushkin nor the southern Decembrists suspected anything of this, and even Mickiewicz learned a great deal only later.

In the winter and spring of 1826, Witte, in the south, was seriously perturbed. His agent Boshnyak had been in St Petersburg for several months, giving incriminating evidence against a number of Decembrists; Witte's enemy, Arakcheyev, was obviously not an important figure in the new court. The situation seemed to be extremely favourable for the career of the intrigue-loving general, and he was anxious to return to St Petersburg, but as yet no one had sent for him. At the beginning of 1826 he requested permission to come to the capital on leave, but was refused: 'If Your Grace have something important and private to communicate to His Majesty,' Dibich wrote to him, 'then you may report it to the Emperor personally in a special packet addressed to me.' Then Witte answered with a curious declaration of his special services: 'Most Gracious Sovereign! Permit me also to add that His late Majesty, of blessed memory, honoured me with his complete trust: from 1809 up to the last minute of his life he entrusted to me assignments of particular importance, assignments unknown to anyone but His Majesty, and myself; that concerning these assignments I had the honour to report directly to His Imperial Majesty, and that, on certain issues on which he was informed, I received neither instructions nor permission from anyone except from His late Majesty personally, and therefore I came, once or twice a year, depending on circumstances, to the capital or the place at which His Imperial Majesty was staying and, having put before him personally the necessary information, received His Majesty's oral instructions. Insofar as these assignments

involve various matters and often require detailed explanations, I, wishing to give a full account regarding everything that has been entrusted to me, respectfully venture to request the honour of being allowed to see Your Imperial Majesty personally.'

At last the desire of the spy-general was granted: he received the long-awaited summons to St Petersburg. Witte arrived in the capital towards the end of May 1826, and on 14 June informed General Kiselyov: 'Knowing the interest you take in everything that concerns me, I am happy to inform you, dear Kiselyov, that I am flattered by the goodness His Majesty shows towards me, that he works with me a great deal and well understands the situation. He is delighted with the condition of my settlements, and takes a great interest in them.'

The archives contain the most varied evidence of that work, of Witte's hectic and diverse activities.

To start with, the Emperor finds himself besieged by Witte's ready-prepared reports—11 in all. Of these, 6 concerned purely military issues (mainly the military settlements), while the remaining five concerned more general questions. Of particular interest is the Note on Deficiencies in the Present Education of the Russian Nobility and Ways of Turning This Education to the Benefit of the Imperial Military and Civil Services. This document is one of a number of similar documents requested by the government at that time (later, Pushkin was also requested to compose a Note on Popular Education). Witte was doing everything he could to play up to the new monarch; attacking home education and 'refined semi-scholarship', the general drew a picture of the 'negative type', an unquestionable caricature of a young man of Decembrist circles: 'He is ignorant, full of self-assurance and self-esteem, and hopes to amaze his audience with the assimilated sounds of a foreign tongue, to astonish fashionable society with extracts of poetry he has plagiarized and learned by heart, or with his clever play on words. In short, the so-called cultured man is a semi-foreigner who has no fundamental knowledge, but merely some superficial acquaintance with facts, which he is capable of using successfully to blind those more ignorant than himself, a cosmopolitan who learns his morality from Diderot and his religion from Voltaire, dreaming of revolutions and freedom and incapable of any occupation, any service.'

This and the other notes received, on the whole, the approbation of the authorities.

Among the things which occupied the general and the Tsar in June and July 1826, was the encouragement of spy

Boshnyak. On 15 July 1826, two days after the execution of five of the Decembrists, the Tsar ordered that Boshnyak be given 'three thousand roubles in banknotes from the office as assistance'.

Four days later Boshnyak was already leaving for Pskov province—and Pushkin; it was an important test, his first assignment from the Tsar!

What was the reason for such menacing instructions regarding the poet, and at a time when the inquiry into the Decembrist affair had been completed and the sentence carried out?

In his draft report, Boshnyak refers to the retired major-general Pavel Sergeyevich Pushchin (not to be confused with the poet's Lyceum friend, Ivan Pushchin), 'from whom originated all the rumours that were the reason for my trip'.

The experts are divided on this question: either the retired Major-General Pavel Pushchin (a friend of Pushkin in the south and leader of the Kishinev masonic lodge) reported 'to the wrong quarters' information discrediting the poet, or else the secret police was making use of a conversation that had been overheard. The latter is clearly the more likely: although relations between the two who were previously friends in Kishinev had now apparently cooled in the provincial backwater of Pskov, nonetheless those relations continued; having been included in the list of Decembrists, Pavel Pushchin did not attempt to remake his career; moreover, according to Boshnyak himself, who visited Pushchin in July 1826, Pushchin did not engage in dangerous frankness.

As is clear from Boshnyak's report, Pavel Pushchin referred to Pushkin as a free-thinker. He could be understood to mean that free thinking was not particularly concealed, and revealed itself in conversations and even in 'songs circulating among the people'. This had been happening only recently, and was happening now. It is quite natural to suppose that this information, transmitted to Nicholas I, was also passed on to Witte: first, as we already know, in those same months of June and July, Witte was constantly working together with the Emperor; secondly, an important element of this work was, of course, those special assignments concerning that part of the investigation which Witte had successfully carried out in the south of Russia. Pavel Pushchin, 'a man from the south', came into Witte's sphere; up to the summer of 1824, Pushkin also came 'under Witte's shadow'. Thus the information concerning Pushkin that had been obtained from Pavel Pushchin was a topic about which the supreme authori-

ty felt it necessary to consult General Witte. Since Boshnyak's assignment did not include an investigation into the reliability of General Pushchin, it is clear that the authorities were frightened and annoyed only by the information concerning Pushkin: propaganda among the people in the fateful days of trial and execution! The Tsar, evidently, issued oral instructions to Witte. Witte explained the assignment to Boshnyak, a man for whom Pushkin's verse was 'not to his taste', but who was obliged to 'praise' it. Boshnyak went to the office of the general on duty at GHQ; there Dibich had the money for his expenses ready for him and open warrant No. 1273 was handed over to state courier Blinkov.

Boshnyak was instructed to deal with other questions in addition to that of Pushkin: he was to make secret observations in the provinces that he travelled through and report on the mood, on abuses, etc. In this respect, the trip made by Boshnyak was fairly typical: in the summer of 1826 many similar, more or less secret messengers were sent out into many provinces.

Having travelled across four provinces in the space of two weeks, Boshnyak took his report to Moscow, where Dibich, Witte and other prominent officials arrived following the Tsar to attend the coronation celebrations. Let us note the measures taken by the authorities to ensure the secrecy of their surveillance of Pushkin and other suspects. It is obvious that many documents were removed and destroyed (the texts of forbidden verse, a copy of an intercepted letter from Pushkin to Pletnyov, sent in March 1826, the report on conversations in which Pavel Pushchin spoke of Pushkin, and others). Before delivering the final text of his report to his superiors, Boshnyak drew up a rough draft based on his diary notes. He was ordered to hand in his rough note-book as well, lest someone discover something. Ninety years later these rough drafts were discovered in the archives of the secret police and were then published.

Boshnyak's report was divided into two independent sections—section A about Pushkin, and section B about the situation in the four provinces he had observed.

State courier Blinkov was waiting with the open warrant in an agreed place, while Boshnyak, cleverly posing as a travelling botanist (and he was, in fact, a professional naturalist), spent the days from 20 to 24 July inquiring about Pushkin's behaviour, about dangerous verses and songs, about the conversations of the inhabitants of Pskov province; he inquired of the inn-keeper, of the district judge, of the wine-trade inspector, of the retired Major-

General Pavel Pushchin; he conversed with father-superior Iona over a glass of strong home-made liqueur (not failing to make a note of the fact that Pushkin also conversed with Iona 'over a glass of cheap liqueur'); he questions a peasant from the village of Gubina, next to Mikhailovskoye (Pushkin, meanwhile, played cards in Pskov, visited his doctor, and then, unhurried and unsuspecting, returned to Mikhailovskoye).

Boshnyak, an experienced agent, collected a great deal of information about the poet, of which the most dangerous, from the government's point of view, was that 'the poet sometimes goes for a ride and, having reached his destination, orders his man to turn the horse loose, saying that every animal has the right to freedom'.

On 25 July, at 8 o'clock in the morning, state courier Blinkov was sent back to hand in the unused warrant for arrest. Boshnyak started work on the second part of his assignment, and his section B contains memorable details—the murder of peasants by landowners, the weakness and indecisiveness of the governor of Pskov, the pranks of one landowner who 'a few days before 14 December, passing through in the company of a fat man with whiskers and someone who was, or was pretending to be, a jester, tried to convince the post-master that Prince Constantine Pavlovich had travelled along the highway on his way to St Petersburg in a hooded cart.'

The court journal, a diary of events at court in 1826, provides a detailed description of the lengthy and magnificent coronation celebrations in Moscow.

According to the journal, each day began for Nicholas with a report by Dibich on all the most important issues. Incidentally, not long before, on 25 June 1826, the Supreme Police Department—the 3rd Department of His Imperial Majesty Own Office—had been created, and subsequently it was to be Benkendorf who would make the main reports to the Tsar. One morning in August, a neatly copied report by Boshnyak, read and approved by Witte, was undoubtedly handed over to Dibich and put before the Emperor. But where is this copy? Apart from the rough drafts in the 3rd Department nothing seems to have survived.

Moscow, the Lefortovsky palace. The Central State Archives of Military History. The Russian Empire was a military state, its government was seen as 'paternal', and therefore it is not surprising if the archives of General Headquarters or the Office of the Minister for War suddenly reveal, alongside papers on artillery, cavalry and infantry matters, documents on, for example, the flooding of the river Neva, or a drunken brawl, or

disorders noted in individual provinces. One document is temptingly entitled:

'File on various information collected by the college counsellor Boshnyak in the provinces of St Petersburg, Pskov, Vitebsk and Smolensk on 25 pages. Opened on 8 August 1826, closed on 15 December 1826.'

The first page of this file is a copy of a document, the original of which was handed over to Boshnyak and his companion. Below we quote the full text:

'Open Instruction.

'The bearer of this document, state courier Blinkov, has been sent on the orders of His Imperial Majesty to detain and deliver to the appointed place, sealing and confiscating his papers if necessary, a certain official who is in the province of Pskov and whose name he will declare when the arrest is made.

'Consequently, on the order of His Imperial Majesty, all military authorities and likewise all civilian officials who compose the local police are instructed to give state courier Blinkov all the assistance and aid that he may require to arrest and escort the official whose name he will declare.

'In St Petersburg. July 19th, 1826.

'Signed by the Minister for War, Tatishchev. No. 1273.'

We can have no doubt as to who is meant by 'a certain official in the province of Pskov'. The number of the order, 1273, is the same as that indicated in the draft report by Boshnyak!

It is the warrant for the arrest of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, and it would have been served if only Boshnyak had received any information confirming the conversation that had been 'overheard' (the conversation involving Pavel Pushchin) about a song that was purported to be circulated among the people, etc. The document before us is typical of official documents, and similar to those written instructions which (true, with the surname included) were given to various state couriers who set off to arrest one or other Decembrist.

So the fate of Pushkin was hanging by a hair, even though he said: 'I would, of course, have vindicated myself.' There is little point in trying to penetrate too deeply into something which did not, in fact, happen, but nonetheless it should be noted that, if Pushkin had been detained and taken to the capital, various things might have happened as a result: the quick-tempered, offended poet could easily have damaged his own case—and he even foresaw such a possibility when he jokingly envisaged a conversation with Alexander I: 'But at this point Pushkin

would have become heated and told me a great deal that he would have done better to leave unsaid, and I would have become angry and sent him to Siberia, where he would have written a poem called "Yermak" or "Kuchum"¹ in rhyming verse with varying meter.'

If further penalties had fallen on the head of the poet, what would have become of him? His best friend, Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin, understood this better than anyone. He, of course, had in mind a life of penal servitude in Siberia, but the views of this Decembrist are basically valid for any form of imprisonment that Pushkin might have suffered:

'Fate ... which saved him from our lot, preserved the Poet for the glory of Russia. Certainly, life in Siberia ... if it had not completely destroyed his genius, would nonetheless have been far from providing the opportunity to reach that level of development which, unhappily, was prematurely cut short even in another sphere of life.'

The poet won from fate ten years of freedom, albeit illusory and conditional, under the surveillance of Benkendorf and Nicholas—but still these are the years that saw his finest works—the *Short Tragedies*, *The Bronze Horseman*, the final chapters of *Eugene Onegin*, *The Stories of Belkin*.

Arrest, detention, disgrace would have robbed us of all these works. In the spring and summer of 1826 everything hung by a hair, depended on the intersection of different, often accidental, mysterious curves—while at a remote staging post in the province of Pskov a state courier whiled away four long days, waiting for his victim.

The first part of Boshnyak's report, the part devoted to Pushkin, is missing from file No. 385 in the Military Archives, which contains only the second part (about abuses in various provinces). The first part was already missing when the report was sent to the archive and the pages numbered (and so, if the rough draft by Boshnyak had not miraculously survived, we would have known nothing).

Very probably, even at the end of 1826, page one of file No. 385 (a copy of the warrant) was immediately followed by page two, on which begins the second part of the report: it was too dangerous to preserve Section A, a document which gave a detailed account of the journey undertaken by the spy, of how he hovered around Pushkin, of

¹ Yermak, a Cossack leader whose invasion of Siberia in the late 16th century marked the beginning of its conquest by Russia, was killed in a battle with Khan Kuchum. A popular legendary hero.

how the state courier waited at the staging post, and how everything 'turned out all right'. It is quite likely that, having read it, the Tsar ordered the part concerning Pushkin to be destroyed. This is an example of the same logic that dictated the removal from the files on the Decembrists of all the dangerous verse.

However, even the missing pages of the fair copy enable us to piece together something about this period in Pushkin's secret biography. Doubtless, the Tsar read the first part of Boshnyak's report at the same time as he read the second, that is, on the morning of 7 August 1826. We may also safely assume that he made some comments in the margin which decided the fate of the exiled poet. On the 7 or 8 August, the GHQ chief General Dibich, was already expected to translate these comments into action. At this point, however, there is still something we do not know: in those August days of coronation celebrations, certain important conversations and discussions took place. A certain case was 'opened on 31 August 1826—decided on 21 September 1826'. But what happened during the month of August? Why was Pushkin not sent for immediately after the 'favourable' report by Boshnyak?

The Tsar was, of course, extremely busy: the coronation, the war with Persia. However, the business of the day continued as usual: on 7 August, the same day when the report on Pushkin was being handed in, Nicholas was dealing with a case of massive abuses in the port of Archangelsk; later he supervised the examination of a chest full of sealed papers belonging to the recently deceased Count Fyodor Rostopchin. GHQ and the secret police were working at top capacity.

Apparently, in the month of August, statements by the Decembrists, 'for' and 'against', the 'Pletnyov affair', more reports and rumours and finally the report by Boshnyak once again laid out side by side on the desk; at the beginning of August, Pushkin's official request, sent on 19 July together with a medical certificate, was making the round of the departments; the previous petitions on Pushkin's behalf made by Karamzin and Zhukovsky (Karamzin had since died, and Zhukovsky was abroad, but someone must have cited their opinion) were placed on the scales.

On 28 August, Dibich made a note: 'His Majesty has ordered that Pushkin be summoned here...'

And Dibich sat down to write 'a most complaisant letter', and on 31 August 1826, they sent for Pushkin.

It was exactly at this time that the first group of exiled Decembrists was being sent east; Boshnyak was awarded the Order of St Anne, second class, with diamonds,

and given a salary of 5 thousand roubles per annum; Witte, awarded the diamond-encrusted Order of Alexander Nevsky, soon departed to return south... Pushkin's friends were cheered by the first news that Pushkin had been set free. 'Alexander was presented,' wrote one of his friends, 'conversed for more than an hour and was showered with benevolent attention.'

Engelgardt was also happy to hear the news about Pushkin, though it was not without anxiety, that he wrote to one of his former pupils: 'Pushkin has been granted permission to come to St Petersburg and will soon arrive. Please God, it will all turn out well and to his benefit.'

Pushkin travelled with the state courier, but 'not as a detainee'. However, his dangerous poem *Andre Chenier* was already attracting attention.

Pushkin entered the Kremlin palace on 8 September 1826. No audience with the Tsar is recorded for that day in the court journal. However, special mention is made of the fact that on the following day the Tsar received 'the French author, Ancelot' (and how could one fail to note that a year later this 'French author' published in France a translation of Pushkin's 'seditious' poem *the Dagger*, the poem about which the Decembrists were questioned and which was so carefully eliminated from the Decembrist files!)

Pushkin entered the palace and was asked: 'Would you have taken part in 14 December?'

'Yes, Your Majesty, my friends were on the square!'

Four years later, Benkendorf was assuring the poet: 'No police were ever given any instructions to keep you under surveillance.'

Surveillance of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin ended much later.

Was Pushkin really Pushchin?

* * *

Two days after the briefcase belonging to Ivan Pushchin and containing verse and other papers had eluded arrest, gendarmes arrived to detain the Decembrist. On 17 December he was questioned by the Tsar, then followed six months of imprisonment in the dungeon, visual confrontation... Then:

'It is the verdict of the Supreme Criminal Court that collegiate assessor Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin shall be sentenced to death. On the behest of His Majesty, he is condemned to loss of rank and nobility and to perpetual penal servitude in exile. In accordance with an imperial

decree of 22 August 1826, he is to spend 20 years in penal servitude, and then be settled in Siberia.'

These lines were read in Mikhailovskoye, St Petersburg, Moscow. The shaken Gorchakov hastened to leave Russia for his embassy in London. But there was no peace: only recently he had tried to get Pushchin across the border, and now his superiors had ordered him to obtain the return to Russia of the emigre Decembrist, Turgenev, who had been sentenced to death in absentio. Gorchakov complied with his duties: he travelled to Edinburgh to attempt to persuade Turgenev personally, and consulted with the English authorities on the possibility of extraditing a state criminal.

Nothing came of all these efforts, although the rumour reached Russia that Turgenev had been seized and was being brought back.

Pushkin, meanwhile, was suddenly released from exile; he returned to Moscow and then travelled, already a free man, back to Mikhailovskoye. His carriage overturned, he was injured, and as he lay in his hotel room he remembered the lines he wrote about the hopes of freedom, about the Lyceum and the iron hand of fate that had dispersed former friends: 'Where's Gorchakov, where are you, where am I?' The draft lines of the poem *To I.I. Pushchin*, 'First friend of mine, friend worth a fortune!' The poem was finished in Pskov hotel exactly one year (less one day) after the insurrection, on 13 December 1826.

On that day Pushchin was not far away, a little more than 300 versts, in the Schliesselburg fortress, from whence he would be taken east, across 7 thousand versts, only the following autumn.

'On the very day that I arrived in Chita,' Pushchin would recall, 'Alexandra Grigoryevna Muravyova (the wife of Nikita Muravyov) called me to the palisade and gave me a sheet of paper on which was written in a handwriting I could not recognise:

*First friend of mine, friend worth a fortune!
I too the hand of heaven blessed
When my remote and snowbound quarters
Rang with your sleigh bell as the horses
Up to the door drove three abreast.
To Providence I pray now, hoping
My own voice will your spirit cheer,
May it sound equally consoling,
And on your exile shed the glowing
Light of our schooldays bright and clear!*

'The voice of Pushkin called forth a joyous echo within me! Filled with profound, reviving gratitude, I could not embrace him as he had embraced me when I was the first to visit him in his exile. Alas! I could not even shake the hand of the woman who had so joyfully hastened to comfort me with my friend's recollections; but she understood my feelings without any of that external display which is, perhaps, necessary for other people and in other circumstances; and Pushkin probably hiccuped more than once.'¹

The rough copy of the verse however, did not find its way to Chita or to London:

*Where are those lime-tree shaded walks,
Where's Gorchakov, where are you, where am I?*

Where is Gorchakov?

Gorchakov had managed to comment a little too forcefully on his superior: 'You cannot imagine my position: to be alive and bound to a corpse.' For this Gorchakov was transferred from London to Rome as first secretary, a considerable demotion in those days.

1828. April 17—transferred to Berlin as embassy counsellor.

1828. December 3—conferred the rank of gentleman-in-waiting.

1828. December 30—appointed charge d'affaires in Florence and Lucca.

1831—conferred the rank of collegiate counsellor.

1834—conferred the rank of counsellor of state, fulfils the duties of charge d'affaires in Vienna and replaces the absent ambassador.

He was rising through the ranks, but only slowly. Soon he would be 40 years of age, but he was not yet a general. Service under the new Tsar was not particularly cheering: he still had to prove to himself that a career and honour were compatible. Gorchakov was frequently ill, he rarely wrote to his friends. However, he did not forget them.

Where are you...

Pushchin to Engelgardt. (From Petrovsky Zavod to St Petersburg. As those sentenced to penal servitude were not allowed to write, the letter was written by one of the Decembrists' wives who had followed her husband into

¹ An old Russian superstition: to hiccup means that someone is remembering you.

exile.)

'Dear Yegor Antonovich! You know Ivan Ivanovich too well for it to be necessary to tell you of his continual interest in everything which concerns you; time, it seems, is producing on him an effect completely contrary to the usual one—instead of cooling the bonds of friendship, it is further strengthening and developing them... He was saddened to read about the last 19 October in your letter. He deplores the fact that this day already unites so few people around their old director. Please give Ivan Ivanovich's greetings to all those who are faithful to the Union of Friendship; rebuke those who are grown cold. For him personally, this day is linked with unforgettable memories; he honours it every year by remembering all his old school-fellows, and tries, as far as is possible, to imagine as vividly as possible the life and activities of each of them. You will agree that this is quite difficult after such a long and, in all probability, permanent separation. Imagination supplies the deficiency of fact. Ivan Ivanovich would like to take the opportunity to remind you of his request, about which I have already written to you on his behalf: he would like to receive from you a few words about each of his Lyceum friends. You will, I am sure, not refuse to grant his wish sometime—it will give him genuine pleasure.

'As for himself, he has no particular news to tell you. His health continues to be good, and that is not unimportant given his way of life. He attempts to shorten time, of which there is no shortage, by various occupations. Nothing of interest ever happens—one day is just like the next—and therefore there is absolutely nothing to tell. Thanks to his fairly happy temperament he is able to make a life for himself in his present situation and to bear it with patience. In the minutes and hours when melancholy comes upon him, he calls reason to his aid and consoles himself with the thought that everything comes to an end! Thus pass the days, the months, the years.'

In penal servitude he was given Pushkin's number—14; the previous, unlucky number (number 13 at the Lyceum) had already 'done its work'. The hundreds of letters he received in Siberia from various exiles indicates that Big Jeannot was one of the most active and popular members of the group.

In the 14th year of his exile he still wrote: 'The most important is not to lose sight of the poetry of life.'

Of his former Lyceum friends almost no one wrote to him directly, only the director passed on information about them all.

And the reason, very probably, was not that they were frightened to write, that note would be taken of it, but that it was uninteresting and inconvenient to write when letters took months to arrive and were read by various officials several times over.

Pushkin sent no letters, but he did not forget.

Four days before 19 October 1827 (the tenth anniversary, the silver jubilee of the Lyceum friendship), at the remote staging post of Zalazy, between Novgorod and Pskov, Pushkin, having lost 1,600 roubles to an officer in a wager played out of boredom, suddenly caught sight of a Lyceum friend, Kuhelbeker, in a group of prisoners being taken east. 'We rushed to embrace each other. The gendarmes pulled us apart. The state courier seized my arm, threatening and cursing. I did not listen to him. Kuhelbeker suddenly felt faint. The gendarmes brought him water, sat him in a sledge and rode off. I continued on my way. At the next staging post I learned that they had been brought from Schliesselburg. But where were they being taken?'

Four days later, on the Lyceum anniversary, Pushkin was in St Petersburg. There he wrote:

*May God be with you, friends of mine,
In life's cares and the cares of duty,
At feasts where friendship is unruly
And in love's mysteries sublime!
May God be with you, friends of mine,
In storms and in life's daily sorrows,
In foreign parts, the wild sea's furrows,
The earth's abysses grim and blind!'*¹

Thanks to their old director Engelgardt, these lines also reached those 'grim abysses'.

Pushchin: 'And on that anniversary, in the circle of his comrades and friends, Pushkin remembered me and Wilhelm /Kuhelbeker/, buried alive, missing from the Lyceum gathering.'

Where am I?

Pushkin had a premonition of his death, and there is no mysticism involved in this fact. A brilliant poet, highly strung, with a profound understanding of himself and the world, senses the proximity of death. In his works, the poet Lensky is killed in a duel, and the great Mozart is murdered. On the way to Arzum, Pushkin himself came

¹ 19 October 1827, tr. by Peter Tempest.

across the body of the assassinated Gribōyedov being brought from Persia on a cart; in Pushkin's verse and in real life Andre Chenier and Ryleyev were executed; shortly before his death he recalled the suicide of the first Russian revolutionary writer Radishchev. All around, poets were dying, prophesying to the living and 'prompting' their assassins.

Pushchin: 'Later I learned of his marriage, and that he had been made a gentleman of the bedchamber; both these pieces of news I found difficulty in assimilating: I could not imagine Pushkin as a family man nor as a courtier; his beautiful wife and his service at court both made me frightened for him. From what I knew of him, all this combined together did not auger stable happiness.'

* * *

'From Annette's letter you will long have known that I got "Six years" back in December; you witnessed my gratitude, so I will not repeat it. You have known me for a long time...'

These are the opening words of a letter that has never been published and that was only recently discovered in Leningrad, in the Manuscripts Department of the Institute of Russian Literature of the Academy of Sciences. This Institute has a second name—Pushkin House; here are collected together all the manuscripts of the great poet, numerous letters and documents pertaining to his relatives, friends, contemporaries... And this letter is written in a hand well known to specialists in 19th century Russian history and literature, the hand of Maria Nikolayevna Volkonskaya, the wife of the Decembrist Volkonsky.

The letter is dated 7 February 1836: Siberia, the labour camp at Petrovsky Zavod, 7 thousand versts from the capital. The main heroes of 14 December were already in their tenth year of imprisonment, and their fate was shared by some of their wives.

However, one soon notices that Maria Nikolayevna Volkonskaya was writing in the masculine gender writing for someone else. From the content of the letter it becomes clear that this time Maria Volkonskaya was writing on behalf of Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin.

February 1836. Less than one year of life is left to the great poet; Pushchin still has 3 more years of penal servitude, and then 17 years of Siberian exile. However, the man whom the poet called 'first friend of mine' has not forgotten his distant, inaccessible childhood friends. This time he (with the help of the wife of one of his fellow-

prisoners) is writing to that same director of the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum who once congratulated the first Lyceum pupils upon their graduation, and presented them with iron rings as a memento.

Yegor Antonovich Engelgardt was never a revolutionary and did not share the political views of Pushchin, Kuhelbeker and some other of his former pupils; however, despite this, he never forgot them, and continued to write to those in disgrace (though this must clearly damaged his career). At the end of 1835, the old director sent lines and sheets of music which deeply moved the imprisoned Lyceum graduate: *Six Years* was the famous farewell song composed by the poet Anton Delvig, a classmate of Pushkin and Pushchin, and the music teacher Tepper Fergusson, to mark graduation day. The first line runs: 'Six years have passed as if a dream...'

Pushkin once included in one of his poems a slightly modified version of some words from this Lyceum anthem:

*It is, perhaps, mysterious fate
That doomed us to long separation?*

And now it is 1836: 'Some are no more, while others live too far away'; Ivan Pushchin, Big Jeannot, still energetic, not crushed by years of penal servitude, thanked director Engelgardt for this precious message (and realised, moreover, that his greetings would be passed on to many friends who called regularly to see Yegor Antonovich or who met him on festive occasions—Misha Yakovlev, Kostya Danzas, Alexander Pushkin). However, in the letter to which Pushchin was replying, the director, evidently, regretted that Pushchin could only read the text of the Lyceum song, but could not hear it performed for all the experienced Lyceum singers were in St Petersburg or Moscow, in another part of the world.

Pushchin protested:

'You are mistaken in thinking that I could not hear those melodies that once united us. My kind friends found the opportunity to afford me pleasant moments. They took the trouble to rehearse all the music, and sang it to me. N. Kriukov sang the part of Malinovsky and totally exceeded him in art and voice. Yakovlev has rivals in Tiutchev and Svistunov.'

This was the curious and moving scene which took place one winter evening in 1836 in some prison cell beyond lake Baikal. Except for Pushchin, there were no Lyceum graduates present but there was no shortage of friends: it turned out that even in this situation—thousands of

versts from Tsarskoye Selo, surrounded by guards and prison walls—it was possible to hold a Lyceum evening. Pestel's comrade-in-arms, Nikolai Kriukov, once a lieutenant, now a 'state criminal, second category'; Alexei Tiutchev, member of the Society of United Slavs, once an infantry captain, now also a second-category convict; and, finally, Pyotr Svistunov, once a dashing cornet in the Guards cavalry, now serving a long sentence for 'plotting regicide'. All of these people suddenly transformed themselves into Lyceum graduates they had never known—Yakovlev, Malinovsky—and sang a song with which they had no connection, 'Six years have passed as if a dream', singing to give pleasure to a fellow prisoner and, clearly, succeeding in doing so.

If they have a common cause, then the song is about them and the Lyceum is their own... However, in the old days the full choral performance of the Lyceum anthem included female voices, mainly those of relatives of the director himself. In the prison at Petrovsky Zavod a solution to this problem was also found.

'You ask where they found a soprano and alto? The modesty of my kind secretary does not allow me to answer this question as I would wish and what, in all truth, I take as undeserved concern for me on their part' (the letter continues in French: 'As you see, Ivan Ivanovich is referring to myself and Camilla Ivasheva, and I must assure you that it was done with lively pleasure'). Pushchin (continuing his dictation to Volkonskaya): 'You will agree, my honoured friend, that this tune sung here had for me its own solemnity; the present fused with the past in the most extraordinary fashion; you will also agree that prison has its own poetry, and happy is he who can understand it. Tell my old Lyceum companions that they are always close to me in my thoughts, and that 10 years of separation, and in some cases more, have in no way altered my feelings towards them. I am not parted, despite circumstances, from those who are faithful to their calling and our old friendship. You, better than any other, can judge the sincerity of such attachment. He who, like you, remembers after so many years a man to whom he has, *en passant*, shown so much kindness, cannot expect time to influence feelings which once went to the very soul. I am more capable than you of valuing this constancy of heart; I am surrounded by many who have been abandoned by relatives and friends; they enjoy your letters together with me, and your feelings must be truly sincere to console them despite your own grief, and to reconcile them to some extent with humanity. In thus telling you the truth I am,

as it were, reproaching others, but it is an involuntary feeling of sympathy towards others at the thought of your friendship towards me.'

This was what the Lyceum graduate and Decembrist Ivan Pushchin wrote to his old teacher 'from the depths of the Siberian mines'. He had not married while still free, but with the help of Lyceum letters and songs, he was able to provide a measure of consolation for those who received no letters, and whose wives and fiancées did not follow them to Siberia.

The pupil and the director were fated to meet once more, but not for another 21 years... And another hundred-odd years later, in the mid-1970s, the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum once attended by Pushkin was opened for visitors; it is just as it was during those 6 years that had once passed 'as if a dream': the main hall, where the young Pushkin read his verse in the presence of the aged Derzhavin, the desks with the note-books and textbooks of the period, the tiny dormitories with the number and surname of the occupant...

Number 13, Ivan Pushchin, Number 14, Alexander Pushkin.

On the Lyceum anniversary of 19 October, people gather here and listen to verse written by Lyceum pupils, and poems about the Lyceum. A choir, a fine choir, performs that same song that once Pushkin, Pushchin, Gorchakov, Malinovsky and Yakovlev joined in singing at their anniversary gatherings, and that was sung for the exiled Decembrist by three of those who shared his fate and by two wonderful women who also shared Decembrist exile... However, let us return to 1836.

19 October 1836 passed, and old school-friends, no longer so young, already husbands and fathers, drew up a protocol to mark the event.

'We celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lyceum (on the Yekaterininsky Canal, in the former Bible House, near the Mikhailovsky Palace, in the flat of Yakovlev).

'Eleven old boys gathered at Yakovlev's flat and celebrated as follows:

'1) dined well and noisily,

'2) drank three toasts:

a) to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lyceum,

b) to its continuing success,
to the health of those absent.

'3) Read letters once written by our absent brother Kuhelbeker to one of his friends.

'4) Read old protocols, songs and other papers kept in the Lyceum archives under the charge of our monitor,

Yakovlev.

'5) Remembered the old days at the Lyceum.

'6) Sang national songs.

'7) Pushkin began to read his verse dedicated to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lyceum, but could not remember all the lines and, moreover, declared that he had not finished the poem; but he promised to finish it, make a copy and to append the original to today's protocol.

'Comments. All gathered together at half past four and parted at half past nine.'

It was also said that Pushkin broke down, tears came to his eyes, and he could not finish:

*There was a time: this youthful feast of ours
Was radiant and rowdy, crowned with roses,
We sang, our glasses rang, we struck fine poses
And in a huddle whiled away the hours.
Then, blithely ignorant and free of worry
We all of us had easier, bolder lives,
We all of us drank toasts that hope might flourish,
Our youth might thrive and all it might contrive.
Now things are different: our jubilees
Have with advancing years, like us, grown sober,
Accommodating, hushed, we think things over,
More dully ring the toasts in cups like these;
In words that we exchange there is less chaffing,
We sit more sorrowful and more obese,
More seldom does our singing turn to laughing,
More often we heave sighs and hold our peace.
All has its day...¹*

One hundred and two days later Pushkin will be killed in a duel with an insignificant officer—a Frenchman called d'Anthes.

'What a pity neither Pushchin nor Malinovsky are here,' the dying Pushkin said to his friend. Another Lyceum graduate, the sailor Fyodor Matiushkin, wrote from Sebastopol: 'Pushkin killed! Yakovlev! How could you have let this happen? What scoundrel was able to raise his hand against him? Yakovlev, Yakovlev! How could you have let this happen?'

And indeed, how did they let it happen? To his dying day Ivan Pushchin was convinced that, had he been living in the capital, he would not have let it happen: 'If I had been present when this wretched story happened... I would have found a way of saving my poet friend, the

¹ *There Was a Time: This Youthful Feast of Ours...*, translated by Peter Tempest.

treasure of Russia.' And those living in Moscow and abroad, Pushkin's best friends in the last years of his life, had no doubt that they would not have allowed the poet to die if they had been beside him.

His close friends in St Petersburg were not able to prevent it—they loved Pushkin, but apparently they needed to love him more, as Pushchin did.

Acquaintances galore, but there's no friend!

Pushchin: 'In thinking very often, then and now, about the early death of my friend, I have frequently asked myself the following question: what would have happened to Pushkin if I had drawn him into our union and if he had had to face a life totally different from the one that fell to his lot?

'It is a bold question, but perhaps I may be forgiven for asking it!

'Certainly, life in Siberia, that life to which we were subsequently doomed for 30 years, if it had not completely destroyed his genius, would nonetheless have been far from providing the opportunity to reach that level of development which, unhappily, was prematurely cut short in another sphere of life.

'In short, in moments of sadness I comforted myself with the thought that the poet does not die, and that my Pushkin is always alive for those who, like myself, loved him, and for all those who are able to discover him alive in his immortal works.'

He now had to live without Pushkin, and ahead of him still stretched 18 years of life in Siberia.

During the first 10 years of exile, the Decembrists, according to their own accounts, hoped for liberation; during the second 10 years their hopes dimmed, and by the third decade they were persuaded that they would never return.

Pushchin once asked his class-mate, the sailor Matiushkin:

'The Lyceum memorial book... It must contain a trick at my and Wilhelm's expense, and my sister is unwilling to send it.'

The trick was a common one: the names of Pushchin and Kuhelbeker had been omitted from the list of graduates for 1817; it was as if they had never attended the Lyceum.

Pushchin to Engelgardt, from the Western-Siberian town of Yalutorovsk, 26 February 1845:

'It is painful to hear that our 19 October is poorly attended; clearly even an iron ring is worn away with time. It is difficult to prevent this having its effect

upon what is good here. I am chagrined at our dignitaries: one would think it possible for them to throw off all those meaningless regalia and appear unpretentiously in their former circle.'

The main dignitary was a man already known to the reader, State-Secretary Modest Andreyevich Korf. The period from the 1830s to the 1850s marked the apogee of his career. A very capable man, knowledgeable, and with a character fully in accord with the times of Nicholas I, so that his talents and his knowledge were accepted and used. He considered the times to be good, and, as we know, was writing his history of 14 December 'for the tsars', while himself aiming at the post of minister of education (he was known as 'the lover of every ministry portfolio').

Gorchakov was serving in harness with Korf, but somehow he was never in step: self-esteem—a sense of esteem. His career was once brought to a halt by the following document: 'By nominal imperial decree of 25 July 1838, Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov is released, on his own request, from all duties and is granted the rank of state counsellor.'

The reason was as follows (the prince's own story):

'Once the second man in the Empire, the all-powerful head of the secret police, Count Alexander Khristoforovich Benkendorf, arrived in Vienna as one of the small retinue accompanying the Emperor Nikolai Pavlovich.

'In the absence of the ambassador, whom I was replacing as the senior counsellor at the embassy, I hastened to present myself, among others, to Count Benkendorf.

'After a few cold phrases he, without inviting me to sit down, said: "Please order a dinner for me today from the proprietor." I calmly went up to the bell and summoned the maitre d'hotel.

"What does that mean?" Count Benkendorf asked me angrily.

"Nothing more, Count, than that, as regards dinner, you may speak to the maitre d'hotel yourself."

'In the eyes of the then all-powerful Count Benkendorf, this answer was sufficient to earn me the reputation of a liberal.'

Shortly after a file was opened on Gorchakov which stated: 'Prince Gorchakov is not without abilities, but he does not love Russia.'

Although Benkendorf died soon after, the file remained open. It was only several years later that Gorchakov, after some difficulty, managed to obtain the modest post of ambassador to the small German kingdom of Wurttemberg where he spent 13 years.

He reached the age of 50 having spent more than 30 years in the diplomatic service; he would be happy to serve, but it's repugnant to fawn. His life and his career were in their decline. Pushkin had forecast a brilliant career for him but, on learning of the beautiful princess Maria Alexandrovna, two sons and a waning career, Pushkin would, perhaps, have rejoiced.

The princess, however, suddenly fell ill and died...

Meanwhile, the times, although slowly were nonetheless changing.

Nicholas I died on 18 February 1855, Alexander II succeeded to the throne and the regime softened. The Crimean war was coming to an end, the emancipation of the serfs was beginning. For the three heroes of our narrative, all of this has important consequences.

Pushkin is published: the first scholarly edition, compiled by Pavel Annenkov and containing many poems and biographical details formerly under a total ban.

Pushchin and his friends were about to be allowed out from Siberia.

Gorchakov was instantly recalled from oblivion. The diplomacy of his superior, Nesselrode, had failed completely. The Crimean war was lost and Russia was isolated. There was an urgent need for capable diplomats. The 50-year-old Gorchakov was unexpectedly made ambassador in Vienna, where he succeeded brilliantly in neutralising Austria towards the end of the Crimean war; thereafter the new Emperor invited him to St Petersburg, and on an April day in 1856, the prince emerged from the Tsar's premises Russia's minister of foreign affairs.

There once existed a notable custom: when someone was appointed a minister, the secret police handed him a present—the file that had been previously opened in his name. One of the old notables was indignant at Gorchakov's appointment: 'How can one appoint as minister a man who had prior knowledge of 14 December!' (Had something been discovered about those earlier conversations with Pushchin?) However, the Tsar had already given the order, the file had been removed, and in it Gorchakov must have read about himself: '...does not love Russia...'

Many years later the old Gorchakov declared: 'It was thanks to my advice to His Majesty Alexander Nikolayevich that those of the Decembrists who were still alive in 1856 were returned.' This is, of course, to exaggerate the role of one counsellor in such an affair—there were many abroad and at court who spoke and wrote about an amnesty in Russia—but Gorchakov, who had suddenly become one of the main figures in the state as he approached

his sixties, was, of course, familiar not only with foreign diplomacy, but with court diplomacy. He clearly found the right moment to speak of those unfortunate old men, no longer dangerous. Naturally, he then must have been thinking of Kuhelbeker and Jeannot, and recalling a long list of deeds in which he could rightly take pride when he met the old boys from the Lyceum: the meeting with Pushkin in 1825, the attempt to help Pushchin on 14 or 15 December, his unconditional friendship, his reply to Benkendorf.

On 26 August 1856, the coronation of the new tsar in Moscow was attended, among others, by the famous general, Nikolai Muravyov-Karsky, a Decembrist's brother and a family friend of the Pushchins, and, serving under his command, godson of Pushchin and son of another Decembrist, Mikhail Volkonsky.

Soon Pushchin wrote in his diary: 'On 3 September courier Misha arrived, the herald of our liberation. He had ridden from Moscow in 7 days—Nikolai Nikolayevich is a man with a soul! On returning from the coronation, he embraced him in tears and said: go and fetch your father... May God bless him!'

Three-quarters of the Decembrists had not lived to witness the amnesty, buried in Siberia or the Caucasus. Only a few returned—without the right to stay for any length of time in either capital. In December 1856, Pushchin saw once again the Moscow he had left one December day 372 months previously and only by accident not in the same carriage as Gorchakov.

These were the circumstances in which the aged Pushchin and his friends were able, on the 31st anniversary of their revolt, 'to say private prayers' in Kazan Cathedral in St Petersburg and visit familiar places in the northern capital.

From Vyazemsky—a deputy minister, an important man at court, considerably changed but not altogether indifferent to his youth—from this Vyazemsky Pushchin received the old briefcase with its precious papers, which had once been passed from hand to hand, most probably by Engelgardt in the presence of Gorchakov.

Just as 31 years earlier, the briefcase contained the constitution written by Nikita Mikhailovich Muravyov, the one of whom it was said that he alone was worth a whole academy. His grave now 14 years old, was in the village of Urik near Irkutsk... The briefcase also contained poems written in his Lyceum days by the poet, who had been laid to rest 20 years earlier at the Svyatogorsk Monastery in the province of Pskov.

During his stay in St Petersburg, Ivan Pushchin also

called on Gorchakov.

'Pushchin is now in St Petersburg,' was the news passed on by one of the friends. 'He is ill, has seen Gorchakov, and Gorchakov was kind to his old school-friend.'

The minister is known to have received old Lyceum pupils without appointment and it may well be that some diplomat had to wait for the end of a conversation between his excellency and provincial landowner Ivan Malinovsky, or retired soldier Constantine Danzas, or even former state criminal Ivan Pushchin.

Can we reconstruct that conversation between Gorchakov and Puschin?

Did they embrace? Probably not... The main topic of conversation was, of course, the Lyceum and its former pupils. Perhaps there was a passing reference to that last meeting in 1825 when Gorchakov had suggested a way of escape. They certainly spoke of Pushkin; perhaps, to start with, they talked of the need to raise a monument to him, but Gorchakov would be unlikely to continue this topic... As a tactful man, he, of course, congratulated Pushchin on his recent marriage to Natalya Dmitriyevna Fonvizina, the widow of his friend and fellow-Decembrist, and they probably exchanged decorous jokes about love, to which 'all ages submit'. Pushchin might have noticed that Pushkin's predication concerning 'crosses, diamond stars, laurels and wreaths' had, albeit after a delay, come true, and the prince, it would seem, had reached the peak of his career. Gorchakov could not have agreed with this, because, first, there was one post higher than that of minister, that of chancellor (and this he was also soon to obtain!) and, second, because there existed a higher ambition which was not yet completely satisfied... The two men could, of course, exchange a few words on general questions of 'politics' and agree that the emancipation of the serfs that had recently begun was a good policy. Gorchakov suggested that under the new tsar things would go well, and Pushchin, naturally, did not tell the minister all he was thinking. Lev Tolstoy said it for him; these words were published only recently:

'It was not Alexander II who emancipated the serfs, but Radishchev, Novikov, the Decembrists. The Decembrists offered themselves in sacrifice.'

Another two years passed, and then, on 22 July 1859, the following lines appeared in the *Kolokol*, the London newspaper published by Herzen and Ogaryov:

•'We have just received news of the death, on 3/15 April, of Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin in a village outside Moscow. We reproach our correspondents for having been so slow

to inform us. Everything that concerns the great advance phalange of our leaders, our heroic elders, should be announced in the paper.'

No other obituary, of course, is published anywhere.

Thus ended the life of Big Jeannot, Ivan Ivanovich Pushchin; 13 years of carefree childhood, 6 years at the Lyceum, 8 years of army service and membership of secret societies, 31 years of prison and exile, plus just less than 3 years on his wife's estate outside Moscow without the right to reside permanently in either of the capitals. Once Pushkin had wished him to greet his 'hundredth May' with friends, Pushchin died just one month before his sixty-first birthday.

Gorchakov was alive and well. He directed the foreign policy of the country for over a quarter century and had something to pride himself on: 'I was the first to use the expression "His Majesty and Russia" in my dispatches. Before me, Europe had no other concept of our country except that of "emperor". Count Nesselrode even reproached me outright, asking me why I did it. "We know the Tsar alone," my predecessor said, "Russia is not our concern."'

In 1870, Napoleon III was defeated by Prussia, and the chancellor, calculating the opportunity precisely, declared that Russia no longer recognised old, humiliating treaties which forbade it (following the defeats in the Crimea) to have a fleet and fortresses on the Black sea. This time England and France were powerless. Gorchakov told his old Lyceum friends that he was proud of the date of his triumph—19 October 1870.

In the years that followed he outwitted the Bismarck. When the German chancellor attempted to further weaken an already defeated France, he heard from the Russian minister: 'I have told you and I repeat—we need a strong France.'

Gorchakov won the first time by playing against France, and the second time by standing by it.

That highest ambition was satisfied—he could indeed consider himself to be the best diplomat.

By old age he would appear to have everything. Out of the 14 ranks set out in the Table of Ranks, he occupied the first. His full title, rank and list of awards occupied a whole newspaper column. His career, in effect, could go no further. This was the summit, beyond which there were only the members of the royal household. Calm, satisfaction, happiness...

It was just Pushkin who troubled him a little.

With the years, Gorchakov's attitude to Pushkin had grown more complex. Of course, no vulgar hatred or jealousy.

However, a certain dislike manifested itself. Pushkin existed, as it were, in two systems of measurement. In one, his position had once been defined by the chairman of the censorship committee: 'Pushkin died in the middle of his great career! What career is that? Was Pushkin a military leader, a general, a minister, a statesman?! To write verse does not yet mean, as Sergei Semyonovich (Uvarov—minister of education) has expressed it, that one has entered upon a great career!'

Let us note that Sergei Semyonovich himself recognised that Pushkin was not altogether the usual gentleman of the bedchamber and titular counsellor: 'To write verse does not yet mean...' that is, it could mean something, but 'not yet!' 'A great career' does not apply to writers of verse, but to people like Benkendorf, Nesselrode, Gorchakov.

Gorchakov lived according to this system, a minister, a statesman. If he had been a typical minister, such thoughts would not have disturbed him. However, he was far more intelligent than the average minister. He was capable of appreciating the true value of someone like Pushkin. And what about his own value?

What really matters on this earth? On one side of the scales there is the chancellor, diplomacy, treaties. On the other—Pushkin's verse dedicated to the Gorchakov he knew at the Lyceum, the meeting in the village in Pskov province in the autumn of 1825.

Such reflections disturbed that inner peace which is such an essential quality of the statesman. He rejected outright the suggestion that he become a member of the committee for the erection of a memorial to Pushkin in Moscow (which included almost all the Lyceum old boys), but contributed 16,000 roubles for a memorial to Lyceum director Yegor Antonovich Engelgardt. He received a message of thanks: 'The Imperial Alexandrovsky Lyceum prides itself on the fact that its list of pupils opens with your name.' Gorchakov, once in second place, was now first.

Once again Pushkin disturbed order by the very fact of his existence. He was part of some other, totally different hierarchy. 'A wayward comet amid the ordered movement in the skies.' The planets were disturbed. 'If there's no God, then how can I be a captain?' asked one of Dostoyevsky's heroes. And indeed, without God, how can he be a captain?

Meanwhile, with every passing year the number of those first Lyceum graduates who had been presented with iron rings grew less and less. Yakovlev died in 1868, Danzas

in 1871, Matiushkin in 1872, Malinovsky in 1873, and Korf in 1876.

'Our circle shrinks with every passing hour,' Pushkin had written 50 years earlier.

On 19 October 1877, on the 60th anniversary of the first Lyceum graduates, the telegramme sent to Gorchakov on behalf of those who graduated over the first 7 years was signed by Sergei Komovsky.

Komovsky, nicknamed 'little fox', and Gorchakov were the last two left. In 1825 Pushkin had asked: 'Which one of us shall in old age be fated to celebrate the Lycee day alone?'

The memorial to Pushkin in Moscow was soon to be ready, and many were involved in the discussions. It is probably strange and frightening to see a memorial to one's own class-mate, one's companion in mischief and fun. Perhaps the 80-year-old ex-Lyceum pupil Komovsky was gripped by such feelings.

'Although I looked at it from every angle, I, unfortunately, could find nothing resembling our exalted poet in this sad, drooping figure in which the honourable artist has embodied him for posterity.' Komovsky did not know and did not wish to know the sad and drooping Pushkin.

But Chancellor Gorchakov took no part in the discussions, and his reaction to the statue is unknown. However, his life increasingly became curious fulfilment of Pushkin's prophecy. More 'crosses, diamond stars', more 'love'. On seeing the aged Gorchakov courting the young Olsufyeva, Pyotr Andreyevich Vyazemsky, 6 years Gorchakov's senior, made the melancholic comment: 'I seem to recall that 67 years ago I was far more successful with the girl's grandmother.' And indeed, in the 1810s Vyazemsky was as irresistible for the young Olsufyeva as was the then Gorchakov for the sweet, ethereal creatures who had long since gone to their graves... 'Great chancellor at the court of love...' begins one of the last verses written by the Vyazemsky's tired, old hand.

Pushkin had now been dead more years than he lived, yet the dialogue between him and the minister still continued!

Before leaving for Moscow to attend the Pushkin Celebration (the unveiling of the statue), Academician Grot was received by the 82-year-old Gorchakov.

Grot: 'He was not altogether well; I found him reclining on a couch or chaise longue; his legs and the lower part of his torso were wrapped in a blanket. He received me very graciously, expressed his regret that he could not attend the memorial celebrations in honour of his old

comrade and, having recited from memory a large portion of his epistle 'Though not acquainted with Apollo...', began to talk about his relations with Pushkin. He said, amongst other things, that he was to our poet what the kitchen-maid was to Moliere, who never put anything before the public without first consulting her; that once he had prevented Pushkin from printing a poem written in bad taste and torn up three of the verses; that he had obliged Pushkin to remove the word "spit", from one of the scenes in *Boris Godunov*, which Pushkin had wanted to include in imitation of Shakespeare; that while Pushkin was in exile in Mikhailovskoye, the prince had vouched for him to the governor of Pskov... As we said farewell, he asked me to convey to the Lyceum graduates who would be attending the unveiling of the statue to his famous comrade that he was happy to see their efforts thus successfully concluded, and regretted that he was unable to attend the celebration.'

What Gorchakov did not tell the academician, who was longing to learn even the slightest unknown detail about Pushkin, was that his archives contained the unpublished mischievous poem *The Monk* which Pushkin had composed while still at the Lyceum, and certain other of his works. Academician Grot, for his part, said nothing incautious, did not demand to be shown the volume of Pushkin's works, did not quote from *Boris Godunov*:

Devichye field, Novodevichy convent. The people beg Boris Godunov to accept the throne.

One of the crowd:

Everyone is weeping.

Come, brother, let's weep too.

Another:

I'm trying hard,

But cannot.

First person:

Nor can I. Have you no onion?

To rub our eyes.

Second person:

No, I'll use spit instead.

What else is happening?

First person:

God only knows.

The people:

Give him the crown! He's Tsar!

He has consented!

Boris is now our Tsar! Long live Boris!

The poem *The Monk*, which Gorchakov had no use for, was in Gorchakov's possession. The lines which Gor-

chakov had wished removed from *Boris Godunov* had remained. In 1825, Pushkin had promised to remove the line with the word 'spit', but had left it in, and Gorchakov knew nothing of this deception. The first to hear *Boris Godunov*, Gorchakov, evidently, never read it.

If Gorchakov had discovered what Grot already knew, he might well have exclaimed: 'Well, there you are! That's Pushkin—never serious!'

Nor did the dialogue between Pushkin and Gorchakov end in 1880. Komovsky died shortly after the unveiling of the statue in Moscow.

Pushkin did not know to whom the last lines of his famous *19th October* were dedicated, but Gorchakov, and he alone, was to discover:

*Which one of us shall in old age be fated
To celebrate the Lycee day alone?
Unlucky friend! Among new generations
An irksome, alien, superfluous guest,
He shall recall us and our congregations,
A trembling palm against his forehead pressed...
May he then spend with joy, though tinged with sorrow,
That whole day sitting with his lone glass there,
As I, a prisoner here in dishonour,
Have spent it free of bitter grief and care.*

The prince had earned his last award, yet another ten lines by Pushkin. However, the minister was far from considering himself to be the 'unlucky friend'. It would seem that he derived pleasure from not one, but many days—1880, 1881, 1882—and up to 28 February 1883. These days when he was the last surviving member of the brotherhood of the ring. All his dreams had come true—he was happy having withstood 'The stormy times, and menaces of fate...'

Gorchakov was destined never to read the rough copy of the lines, published already after his death, addressed to the unforgettable Big Jeannot, Ivan Pushchin:

*Where are those lime-tree shaded walks,
Where's Gorchakov, where are you, where am I?*

Epilogue

One of the best experts on Siberia and the Decembrists, Mark Constantinovich Azadovsky, sent a post-card written in pencil and dated 'Petrovsky Zavod, 1 July 1931'. A week later it arrived in Leningrad and was delivered to Sergei Gessen, a young and talented researcher into Pushkin and the Decembrists (who died in an accident at the age of 35).

'I think you will be happy to receive a line from a station with such a name. I very much regret that I cannot get off the train and spend at least three days here—there are still old men in the neighbourhood who remember Gorbachevsky. This, by the way, is the first time I have travelled through Petrovsky Zavod since I became a sworn Decembrist seeker, and indeed, I could not help being strangely moved. I felt as if the shades of the Decembrists had gathered round me, and I was conversing with them...

'I saw Lunin, but the old man seemed to be very concerned and upset about something. However, Svistunov was looking very much the dandy, and kept throwing a haughty and condescending glance at Lunin, of whom he was never very fond. I avoided meeting Ivashev.

'I was about to compose a stanza of a poem on the subject ('A Night in Petrovsky Zavod', but the whistle of the locomotive disturbed the enchantment of the quiet, moonlit night in Petrovsky Zavod—the train set off, and I went to my compartment to sleep...'

Over half a century has passed since that remarkable letter was written. The 'shades' are a century and a half old...

Yet even today, if one gets off the train at Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky (14 hours to the east of Irkutsk), one may expect discoveries and revelations. There are no longer any 'old men in the neighbourhood who remember Gorbachevsky'. But we can still hear the voice of that amazing man.

'My heart contracts when I visit the cell: how many memories, how many losses I suffered, yet this grave, this tomb of our youth or young life, exists. And all this was built for us. What for? Whom did we wish evil? All of you have long since departed from this place and your

impressions have faded, but I am in quite a different position, for I have constantly before my eyes this memorial of tender care for you' (from Gorbachevsky's letter to a former fellow-exile).

The dungeon, as if it had heard Gorbachevsky's bitter reproach, succumbed to 'self-destruction' shortly thereafter (1866). It burned down. Now the site is occupied by a boarding school.

If you go up behind the school building, you have the feeling you've already been here. It was from this spot that the Decembrist Nikolai Bestuzhev drew his picture of the scene before him. The drawing has survived and is well known: the artist-prisoner, the soldier guarding him, and below, the factory and the settlement.

You may climb higher still, up a hill which is the highest vantage point in the district, and ask a passer-by 'What is the name of this hill?' 'Lunin's hill,' he answers matter-of-factly, as if the hill had appeared bearing that name. It was here that the former horse-guard, duellist, Parisian proletarian, musician, conspirator, wit and condemned man, Mikhail Lunin, used to come to gaze at the world and 'soar upwards in spirit'.

On returning to Decembrist Street where the prison once stood, you can see, a little way down the road, a ramshackle, two-storey wooden house that belonged to princess Trubetskaya, empty and waiting for the restorers. This emptiness, this air of abandonment gave the house a special atmosphere of its own, and the shades naturally came out of the rooms to greet each other in the corridor...

Ivan Ivanovich Gorbachevsky, a member of the Secret Decembrist Society of United Slavs, came into the world together with the new century, on 22 September 1800. A first-category convict, he arrived in Petrovsky Zavod in the summer of 1830, and here he spent more than 3 thousand days in penal servitude. Many years later he recalled 'how we once lived together in the prison and joked and laughed, regardless of locks, warders and sentries'. Laughter is one of the most important weapons in the battle for survival.

Not far away, on a piece of high ground, there is an old graveyard: the grave of the first to die here, Alexandrina Muravyova. The dates on the tombstone tell their own sad tale: 1804-1832. First all of the prisoners, and then the lone Gorbachevsky kept the lamp burning over the grave. Next to it is another tombstone, which reads: 'Anna Annenkova. 1829-1833'. We can imagine much of what lies behind this inscription: the Decembrist Annenkov, the arrival of Pauline Gueuble, the joy of the parents,

the little girl reaches the age of four, is already talking—and a tombstone...

A little lower down, almost at the entrance to the cemetery, there is a tombstone without any name; once there stood upon it a truncated pyramid, the sign of the expiry of the family line. Here lies the body of Lieutenant-General Leparsky, the governor of the penal settlement, the severe, yet indulgent warden of the Decembrists, who ordered the bold Ivan Sukhinov to be put to death for attempting to escape, yet permitted a number of relaxations of the rules, which allowed the majority to survive in prison.

The general died as the prison sentences of the main, 'first category' Decembrists were drawing to an end. They had not yet appointed a new governor, when, in 1839, (according to one Decembrist joke) 'the confinement of Madame Petrozavodsky Prison was over, and she brought into the world children who seemed viable enough, although all of them were inclined to asthma, or weakness or greying hair'.

All left to settle in various places—Irkutsk, Kurgan, Selenginsk, Yalutorovsk. Only one, of his own choice, remained behind—Gorbachevsky. 'Ivan Ivanovich,' the local inhabitants recalled, 'was a most kind-hearted man: he treated the sick, lent flour and money but always forgot to ask for it back, and lived on the barest necessities.' He lived here for almost 40 years, went out into the forest with his gun, doctored and collected books. It was here that he performed the greatest, one might almost say Lunin-like exploit of his life: he wrote a record as remarkable as it was secret. Two years after his death, this record somehow came into the possession of the editor of the journal *Russian Archives*, Pyotr Bartenev; fortunately a copy was made, and it is this copy that is used to publish the numerous editions of this precious document, for the original manuscript has vanished without a trace! What is more, the copy also disappeared for a long time, but then returned all of a sudden—it was bought purely by accident from a second-hand book dealer in the 1930s! Bartenev discovered relatives of Gorbachevsky, by the name of Kvist, who had a number of extremely interesting letters and papers of the Decembrist, which provided information supplementing his memoirs (however, the Kvist archive also disappeared before it had been published, and attempts to trace the family itself lead to Germany).

The notes of Gorbachevsky... If it were not for Ivan Ivanovich, we would know incomparably less about the

most significant events—the Society of United Slavs, the revolt of the Chernigovsky regiment. The main leaders of the Southern Society—Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Pestel and Bestuzhev-Riumin—were hanged and could not write their memoirs. The papers of the inquiry into the cases of hundreds of those involved in the southern insurrection have still not been found. Paradoxical as it might seem, a major, comparatively recent historical event was in danger of slipping into oblivion.

We remember how, one day in autumn 1825, the young Ivan Gorbachevsky and Sergei Muravyov-Apostol vowed to each other that if one of them survived, he would write about their cause.

One of them survived—and he combined his own recollections with a great many others. He visited his friends and compelled them to relate their stories. At the risk of his life—for the punishment could well be penal servitude or death—he was collecting and preserving...

In the State Historical Museum in Moscow there is a letter from Gorbachevsky to the Decembrist Pushchin.

Following the amnesty, they all went home, 'to Europe'. Only a few remained in Siberia, having grown accustomed to a part of the world that had previously been their prison.

'If Bestuzhev and Zavalishin go back to Russia, I will be alone in Eastern Siberia, or at least, I know no-one else who is living here. I will be alone, and I will sit here like Marius on the ruins; I am myself a ruin little better than those of Carthage, but I have one weakness that is unforgivable: I sometimes dream of my Little Russia /the Ukraine/ and feel homesick, and the older I get, the more I feel my loneliness and sadness overcomes me. Reading is my sole salvation in my present life—without that I don't know what I would have done. It seems strange to me, and sometimes I ask myself, how these people live and how they view the world after Chita, Petrovsky Zavod, Itantsi and other such places. And after all of this, to live in Moscow, Kaluga, etc., etc. What impressions they must have, what memories! And then meetings with relatives, with old acquaintances... To me it all seems to be pure fantasy and dreams.'

Of the three Decembrists staying in Siberia, Mikhail Bestuzhev nonetheless left to die to Moscow; Gorbachevsky wanted to stay in Petrovsky Zavod, Zavalishin chose Chita. Gorbachevsky got his wish, but Zavalishin did not!

The Chita archives contain a particularly wide range of information about Dmitri Zavalishin, a former lieutenant

in the navy, sentenced at the age of 22 as a first-category prisoner as a result of 14 December.

In 1839, when his 14-year sentence of penal servitude came to an end, he requested to go not to the west, as most of his fellow-prisoners, but to the east, to Chita, to join his fiancée, a local girl called Smolyaninova. On 9 September 1839, Zavalishin wrote the first of his many petitions—that he be given a better plot of land in place of the 15 *dessyatinas* of useless land that he had been granted and which was 'ill-suited for grain growing', that he be permitted to make trips in connection with his affairs, and that, in order to have the necessary income, that he be permitted 'to present my writings for publication'.

He was allowed to run his affairs, but his 'wish to publish his writings can definitely not be satisfied, since in response to previous requests of the same kind from others like Zavalishin, Chief of Gendarmes Count Alexander Khristoforovich Benkendorf decided that it would be improper to allow them to publish their writings as this would put them in a position not corresponding to their situation.' Well then, since he could not earn a living by publishing even harmless articles about Siberia, Zavalishin would turn to his allotment and kitchen garden, but at the same time would regularly demand, and receive, allowances from the state. In the archives one is constantly coming across papers on this issue which, in addition, reveal the way of life and even the physical appearance of the former lieutenant: 'State criminal Dmitri Zavalishin has received for rations and clothing: for 21 pouds 10 pounds of rye flour valued at 50 kopeks a poud—in total—10 roubles 62 kopeks. For 2 pouds 30 pounds of ground barley—in all 2 roubles 14.5 kopeks. For an overcoat of coarse cloth, 10 arshins,—1 rouble 80 kopecks. For one pair of winter foot-cloths and one pair of summer foot-cloths—75 kopecks. For one pair of footwear—43 kopecks. For one pair of mittens—45 kopecks. Plus various other amounts for a cap, two linen shirts, two pairs of linen trousers'; and, finally, 6 roubles 'for a fur coat' and also 'food allowance'—the total for the year amounting to 114 roubles 28.5 kopecks.

Gradually, however, this exiled settler managed to obtain considerably more. Irkutsk (where the governor-general resided) was a long way off, and a new administrative unit—Transbaikal region—was formed around Chita. The administrators of this new region knew nothing about it, but here they had an energetic, business-like man who knew a dozen languages, was familiar with agriculture,

various crafts, prices, etc., and aware of the needs of the area. 'I may not be Count Chitinsky,' Zavalishin used to say, 'but I am the real administrator of the region.' A dangerous joke: Count Chitinsky rhymes with Count Amursky, the title of the then governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Nikolai Muravyov. Soon Count Amursky came to view the initiative and influence of 'Chitinsky' as an irritation. In the opinion of the governor-general, he knew too much and interfered too much. Even before the amnesty for the Decembrists, the first attempt was made to resettle the troublesome exile ... in the west. In May 1855, the administrator of Transbaikal region received instructions to transfer Zavalashin to Minusinsk. The Decembrist immediately sent a complaint to St Petersburg, to the chief of gendarmes Count Orlov, and the Transbaikal governor, evidently not wishing to lose such an experienced specialist, certified that Zavalashin was ill and appealed to the authorities in Irkutsk to cancel the transfer.

The authorities in Irkutsk, however, were implacable. On 12 August 1855, Major-General Ventsel, who was temporarily replacing Muravyov, instructed the Chita authorities: 'In view of the fact that the more agreeable climate of the Minusinsk district, which is situated further south-west than Chita territory, may have a beneficial influence upon the health of Zavalishin, and that it was precisely for this reason that he was selected for resettlement in Minusinsk, I respectfully request that measures be taken immediately to ensure the transfer of Zavalishin, and that I be informed of the execution of this order.' It would seem that situation was now clear. It was impossible to oppose the authorities any further, and the file contains Zavalishin's signature: 'I undertake, having settled my domestic affairs, to be in total readiness for the departure for Minusinsk on the 25th of this coming September, 1855, and there unto I append my signature.' However, while Zavalishin was preparing to leave, the authorities in Irkutsk finally realised that the exile had already managed to send a complaint to the chief of gendarmes. On 19 August, Irkutsk angrily inquired of Chita: 'In view of the fact that Zavalishin as a state criminal ... does not have the right to enter into written correspondence except through the authorities, I have the honour to request that I be informed how and when Zavalishin petitioned his grace Count Orlov?' Zavalishin himself replied that he had written to Orlov just as he had previously written to Benkendorf, and had passed the letter on through his immediate superior.

So it turned out that the Decembrist was able to use St Petersburg to trump the aces held by Irkutsk, and shortly afterwards this was admitted officially. 'I find myself obliged,' wrote General Ventsel, who had suddenly undergone a change of heart, 'to allow Zavalishin to stay in Chita until the return of the governor-general', that is, in the absence of Muravyov himself (who had still not returned to Irkutsk from a lengthy trip), his replacement refused to take the decision 'to transfer the exile'. While the protracted correspondence continued, the general amnesty for the Decembrists was announced (26 August 1856). Zavalishin was restored to his noble rank and permitted to choose his own place of residence. He unhesitatingly chose Chita, from which it would now be extremely difficult to remove him.

Zavalishin lived for another 7 years in this town, constantly exposing and criticising the Siberian administration in Irkutsk, Moscow and St Petersburg newspapers. According to many of the reports by the authorities, the four 'most troublesome people in Siberia' at the beginning of the 1860s were undoubtedly headed by 'Count Chitinsky'. In 1863, the new governor-general of Irkutsk, Korsakov, literally begged that Zavalishin be removed from his territory, and Zavalishin was transferred from Chita ... to Moscow! The indomitable Decembrist, as we can see, was indeed exaggerating his poor health in order to hold the authorities at bay, for he continued to write and to work for nearly another 30 years. He died in 1892, having outlived all those involved in 14 December.

Gorbachevsky remained east of lake Baikal, in Petrovsky Zavod. The lonely old man continued to write.

His enormous archive is yet another which has vanished without trace. Except for the notes which were sent west in the year their author died... Today, 80-year-old Anna Kolobova, who lives in Petrovsky Zavod, does not, of course, remember the Decembrist, but she asserts that in the 1920s some papers were lying in the attic of her house, which had previously belonged to Gorbachevsky. Perhaps they are awaiting discovery?

At some distance from the graves of the other Decembrists, on a piece of raised ground, there stands a big black iron cross totally unlike any of the crosses on the other graves, as unusual as was the man who lies beneath:

'Ivan Ivanovich Gorbachevsky
Born 22 September 1800
Died 9 January 1869'

'He left behind him,' one of the exiles recorded, 'the sum of 14 roubles. Sensing approaching death, he had bought fish and various other things for the funeral dinner... Not long before his death, Gorbachevsky requested that he be buried not in the cemetery, but nearby, on the top of a hillock, so that he could look at the street where, whatever kind of life it had been, he had lived... And so it was done...'

It was here that Gorbachevsky came to look down from the knoll. We can look with his eyes at the pond by which the Decembrist prisoners once worked. The world's longest railway line, the great Siberian line, was laid directly below the cemetery and the knoll 40 years after his death. He loved to stand here—here his life had passed, here he composed his memoirs. From here one has a clear view of the cabin upon which today there hangs a memorial plaque: 'The house in which the Decembrist Gorbachevsky Ivan Ivanovich lived and died. 1839-1869.' Some parts of the house are black with age; they have survived from those years. Now the house serves as a town library and the former home of the Decembrist is listed under the address—13, Gorbachevsky Street.

Late at night, in a drizzle, the train draws quietly out of the Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky station on its way west.

It is 6 thousand kilometers to Moscow.

We are saying farewell to that part of the world where, for many years after the insurrection, remarkable old men continued to live, joke, tell their story, the old men who never lost their youth, the 'revolutionary aristocrats'.

And that is why they are eternally young in the memory of their nation.

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In this book, the well-known Soviet historian Natan Eidelman describes Russia's first, aristocratic revolutionaries—the Decembrists, who staged an insurrection in 1825 against Tsar Nicholas I in an attempt to reform socio-economic life in Russia. The narrative focusses on a psychological portrait of the most prominent members of the Decembrist movement, on their subsequent fate, and the influence of their ideas and deeds on the generations that followed.